THE MONGOLIAN HORDE

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THE MONGOLIAN HORDE

A BUDDHIST PRIEST IN MEDITATION

THE MONGOLIAN HORDE

By ROLAND STRASSER

TRANSLATED
FROM THE GERMAN BY 'R.T.G.'

With an Introduction by
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INTRODUCTION

NEARLY six years ago at Mr. W. B. Paterson's gallery in Old Bond Street, and at the Austrian Legation in London, there were shown a number of pictures and drawings by Mr. Roland Strasser. Those who had the good fortune to see one or other of these exhibitions were deeply impressed by the personality of the painter and by his power of portraying the glowing colour of the attire and ceremonial sports which he had seen in the island of Bali, where there is an exotic mixture of Hindu and Malayan life and art. Not less remarkable were his drawings of Mongolian types, masterly in portraiture and as records, sympathetic and exact, of a remote, wary, and humorous race. The lapse of time has not weakened our admiration for Mr. Strasser's insight and graphic power. He has genius – genius for adventure, for psychology, and for representation. Many of his drawings have the subtle plastic beauty of Indian sculpture.

Roland Strasser is Basque by descent, but Austrian by birth, upbringing, and education. He is now forty-four. His father, whose family name was Quirquez, won distinction as a sculptor in Vienna, where he taught in the Academy of Fine Arts. He bred his son to art and travel, taking him, after his course at a Realschule, to Egypt in the lad's seventeenth year. From 1911-15 Roland Strasser studied painting under Jettmar in the Academy at Vienna. In 1919 he went to Holland, where he painted at Volendam, and by his brush earned enough to travel in the following year to the East.

'There's a schooner in the offing
With her topsails shot with fire,
And my heart has gone aboard her
For the Islands of Desire!'

By Siam and Java he made his way to New Guinea. Here he fell in with an adventurer, who might have stepped out of one of Conrad's novels. With this man Strasser set out on a journey into the interior. He discovered that his companion's purpose was the illegal one of shooting birds of paradise. The ruffian deserted Strasser in the forest, and for more than four months the young painter was marooned in a Papuan village, from which at last, but with the loss of all his drawings, he made his way back to the coast. From New Guinea he wandered back to Java, and visited Borneo, Celebes, Flores, and Timor. At last he reached the fascinating island of Bali, where he stayed eighteen months. In the autumn of 1922 he went to Peking, and thence into the province of Shansi, which of late has been the scene of one of the most disastrous of famines. Here he made studies of peasant life which remind one of Thomas Hardy's lines:

'Only a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk,
With an old horse that stumbles and nods,
Half asleep as they stalk.

Only thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch grass:
Yet this will go onward the same
Though Dynasties pass.'

From Shansi Strasser made his unhurried way into Mongolia, and thence in 1924 through the province of Szetschwan into the mountains of Tibet. Intrepid and

adventurous, he studied human life in these regions with the ardour of a painter who is also a psychologist. The drawings and pictures which he had made during this journey he brought to London. Here Mr. W. B. Paterson recognized their singular merit, and arranged for their successful exhibition.

With the proceeds of his show Strasser set out again for the East. For him, as for Ulysses

> 'All experience is an arch where-through
> Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move.'

Through Bombay, Nagpur, and Calcutta he went to Darjeeling on the foothills of the Himalayas, and there planned another journey into Tibet. At Kalimpong, which one sees far across the valley from Darjeeling, Strasser assembled his little caravan. In January 1925 he crossed the Kula Pass, and after a journey of ten months again reached Urga in Mongolia in the winter of 1925. In the districts surrounding Urga he spent a year. At Urga the Soviet officials arrested Strasser as a spy. His diary and the map which he had made during his journey were confiscated, but he was allowed to keep his pictures and drawings. In the winter of 1926 he travelled through the Gobi Desert into China, arriving at Kalgan just when General Feng Yu-hsiang was forced to evacuate the town by the advance of General Chang So-ling from Mukden. By the first train which had run for eight months Strasser travelled to Peking, where he had the misfortune of seeing all the drawings made during his long journey in Tibet and Mongolia pillaged and destroyed by Chang So-ling's undisciplined troops. From Peking, he went to Tientsin, and thence to Kobe and Kyoto. The illness of his father recalled him after eight months in Japan, by the Trans-

Siberian railway to Vienna. Since his father's death in October 1927 Strasser has stayed in Europe. In February 1928 an exhibition of his works at the gallery of Bernheim Jeune made his pictures and drawings well known in Paris. But Strasser has travel in his blood, and plans another long journey through Vladivostok and the Aleutian Islands to Alaska.

This book, skilfully translated and abridged by 'R.T.G.,' records Strasser's impressions of life in Mongolia at a time of unrest and of unprecedented change. About Mongolia, I know no book so good as this. It has immediate interest, and will have historic value. Especially because it records, with the insight of a trained eye, the incoming tide of a rather superficial Westernism which undermines the dark cliff of terrifying and demon-worshipping Lamaism. But the book is grim and grave. It describes, with a painter's exactitude, the colour and characteristics of the Mongolian landscape and also the working of the Mongolian mind. Nothing is more distinctive of an artist than the power of visual memory. Of this power we have examples in Mr. Compton Mackenzie's book on Gallipoli, and in the poems in which John Freeman recalled some of the experiences of his childhood. Mr. Strasser, though his note-books have been destroyed, can evoke distinct and vivid recollections with what is rightly called the mind's eye. He makes one see what he saw. Better than the camera is the eye of the artist. In reading some of his grim Mongolian sketches I am reminded of the art with which Vernon Lee has evoked the colour and contrasts of medieval life.

There are things in this book which make one shudder. Strasser is haunted by a sense of the insignificance of man, and yet by the unfathomable significance of human life. Pascal had the same feelings. But Pascal had assurance in his belief. Strasser is less happy. The undertones of his book are pathetic. I do not feel the same undersense of

sadness in his drawings and paintings. But when he uses the pen instead of brush or pencil, he seems to come under the influence of thoughts which perplex and baffle him. With Doughty or with Aurel Stein one does not feel this undercurrent of apprehensive fear. With Strasser himself when he draws and paints one does not feel it. But when he turns to words and expresses himself in literature, he seems harassed and haunted by intellectual disquietude. Is there something too exclusively intellectual in the school training enforced by the exacting regulations of secondary schools in Central Europe? Do those schools give the sort of liberal education which is best (not only for the future) but for those of whom it may be said that

'Words are but under-agents of their souls?'

In the Strasser, whose intrepid love of travel has its counterpart in the brave integrity of his artistic conscience, I feel that there is a shadowy second self, less confident of its own judgment, trying to express itself through a medium less congenial to his temperament than are the graphic or plastic arts; discoloured by doubt and even by a pessimism caught from those currents of European opinion which are over-intellectualized in the sense of being too open to intellectual suggestion, and (in things of the mind) not reliant enough upon independent observation and instinctive judgment: fluent, as it were, in the expression of other people's generalizations rather than obstinately faithful in working out its own way of expressing what it really feels: a double personality of which by far the stronger and richer is the personality of the painter, which is tonic, decisive, and inspiring.

MICHAEL E. SADLER

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FOREWORD

I GAVE up my window seat in the tram to a little child. It proceeded to kneel on the bench with its feet turned inwards, laid its head on its arms, and pressed its face flat against the window pane. Eagerly its wandering gaze drank in all the passing sights, absorbed in admiration and interest. It gazed and beheld without reason or prejudice, letting every impression sink in impartially and uncritically. Later on, at home, what it now sees may find expression in one form or another; though we grown-up people may think it but a childish pastime, when a child feels an impulse to formulate what it has experienced. It may take a pencil and try to reproduce something of what it beheld, and of what by now has become a fixed image in its mind.

During five years of wandering in the heart of Asia, I accepted my experiences and impressions like such a child. Nor was there any definite intention, when setting out on my venture, of harvesting material for a book. But now that it is over I feel the impulse to note down and retain, while they are still vivid, some at least of the strange and thrilling impressions that crowd upon me, in the shape of a few descriptive and open sketches.

I can give no special reason for having undertaken such a journey, except one's own personal quest, which, for us Europeans, is limited and narrowed by modern civilization to so much that is against nature in every way, forcing our allotted destiny into a more and more narrowing circle of prejudice. By this tramp of five years through Asia I

wanted to justify my rights as a human being and, under boundless skies, without any set purpose or limitation of time, to come into contact with Nature herself with courage and endurance, and without negation. I kept a diary during my travels which would have enabled me to give details of dates and names that in the course of time have escaped my memory; but this book was unfortunately taken from me by the Mongols, when, suspecting me of being a spy, they imprisoned me for a few days, and I never saw it again. Therefore I have only memory to rely on, and many of the actual details of those exciting and forceful incidents have faded, so that only the larger features and general impressions remain. Though that diary would not materially alter the framework of my sketches, I personally feel its loss acutely, as being an incontrovertible proof of what I state. Many of the local names of lama settlements that I touched in my wanderings, not given on any map, have escaped my memory. Therefore, out of consideration for my readers, I have refrained from a detailed and consecutive account, and only attempt to give the general atmosphere, as I perceived it, of these countries that extend over two longitudinal and four horizontal degrees of our globe, which I traversed mostly on foot, or on camel-back, or occasionally by car. The regular alternation of day and night as one moves across an open expanse with the wide horizon ever around one, leaves in one's memory, at the end of the journey, a sort of precipitate of facts – like the residue left over after some process of distillation. The annihilating immensity of a desert or steppe country, where, when we attempt to traverse it, one week is an exact repetition of the week before, makes us realize that with all our cares and impulses we are but mere specks or microbes in the infinity of the universe; and teaches us not to boast of any specially merciful dispensation or luck, that does not originate from

within ourselves, and of which we are not the mainspring and cause.

The people who are the outcrop of those negative-natured countries draw near to God in the realization of their own nothingness.

THE MONGOLIAN HORDE

PART I

THE PASS

After long hours of marching the caravan had called a halt. A dying breeze ruffled the wool on my sheepskin, and the camp fire glowed dim. Around me that all-powerful spirit of Tibet that pervades the day was sinking into the slate-coloured gloom of twilight, and the fantastic images of night were astir. Grey clouds climb over the tall and jagged skyline that encloses our valley, and hurry along overhead, pushing and jostling, and overtaking each other like a startled herd. Over the ridge of the world's roof a storm rages with the swelling melody of deep organ tones, fanning up fountains of sparkling ice-dust.

As the daylight recedes from the valleys and ravines, fear stalks abroad with outstretched claws, and all life dwindles to puny insignificance. Thunder mutters across the wide spaces like a deep-voiced choir of chanting lamas, accompanied by the rattle of prayer-drums and booming gong-notes; and, like the clicking beads of their rosaries, large drops of rain splatter down on the spongy moss-clumps of last year's growth that cover the ground.

The shepherds have not yet left the lower valleys, for the sun is still clutched in the cold embrace of winter and emits but weak and short-lived comfort. We are the first occupants of the deserted Dogpa camp this season. It consists of a rough windscreen made of large blocks of stone, from which the moss-covered ground round the camp slides away into darkness, with yak oxen grazing here and there,

looking more like fur-covered couches than animals, while the wind rakes their shaggy coats which hang down to the ground in great tassels. These dignified and slow-moving creatures have iron sinews and a power of endurance schooled by the life-crushing distances they have to traverse.

After a ten hours' march, our primitive resting place is the sodden ground. Too tired to sleep, I toss from side to side, seeking rest. I seem to be still moving forward step by step, bent sideways into the teeth of a wind tearing down from the ice-bound heights above. That rhythm of walking has got hold of me, and I still sway beside the wind-chivied steps of horny yak hoofs, measured and untiring like a noiseless machine. Step by step the path unrolls across valleys and over heights, eating its slow way into the unending distance. I am pervaded by the rhythm of this motion, and all my nerves repeat it. At times the dirty lama walks beside me, his weather-beaten face swaying up and down like a pendulum, while he fingers the beads of his rosary; at others the leader of the caravan, with his dark snow-goggles and matted, wind-tossed hair, all covered with sand. The slender barrel of his long muzzle-loader rears high above his head; its rest, consisting of a gable of two long antelope horns, is turned back, and the lock wrapped in a red cloth. At the tip of the ramrod, the inevitable prayer-banner flutters in the strong mountain wind. As he walks, he unceasingly draws a hand-long strand from a bundle of wool wound round his left arm, turning a spinning spool between his fingers, and so forming a thread which he then winds upon the spool. Thus we wander in the endless procession of time and space.

My brain is like a mirror over which a breath runs, dulling it for minutes at a time to the verge of a dream. The lama in his dirty red rags wanders here and there in the blowing shadows of dusk, over the moss-covered ground which takes on the appearance of an ocean bed covered

TIBETAN CARAVAN LEADER

with large bath sponges. This moving spectre stoops repeatedly to seek for the droppings of animals that have long vanished, swallowed by time and space; he collects the dry dung as he circles around, vanishing and reappearing, a tiny, solitary human dot in this immensity of cold and mysterious nature, crowned with a high girdle of ice-blue glaciers. The fire has dwindled to a heap of grey ashes. A cutting breath creeps down from the heights, and the brown puddles between the clumps of moss begin to film over with a delicate glassy web. The air is charged with minute icy crystals blown down from the jagged snowclad peaks in a white spray, visible in the increasing luminosity of the night. Presently the wandering shadow approaches noiselessly, and becomes again the form of a man with gathered-up skirt, from which he lets fall his harvest of dried yak dung.

Tomorrow we are to reach the top of the pass, above the long rising slope of ground on which sheets of snow are spread in immaculate white without crease or fold, and seem unbelievably near; the silver light from them radiates and sparkles up into the dark steely sky, with its hurrying clouds. Crouching on the ground the lama arranges the pieces of dung around the ashes, and, leaning forward on his hands, he blows at them sideways. A biting smoke comes up in thick white swirls, to be at once snatched away by the wind. Little flames flicker timidly, and gaining courage, illuminate the weather-beaten face of this Tibetan lama. Summer heat and wintry nights had tanned and roughened it, and deep pock-marks made it look as though it had been spattered with mud. From between his cheek-bones, standing out like watch-towers from the strong line of the jaw, his flat-ridged nose and distended nostrils seemed to be scenting the wind. Observing eyes gleamed from the slits, devoid of eyelashes. The wide mouth was thrown out in fleshy weather-blue lips. On this strange

mask, floating apparently on the darkness, the flickering firelight played mysterious tricks, throwing behind it a huge bulky shadow, that reached out terrifying feelers, clutching at me with unbearable insistence.

Bitterly cold in spite of the fire, I drew my fur up closer and turned over, but this face had crept behind my eyelids into a dream, for suddenly the lama's form seemed to be standing out in violet outline against the snowfields, as he bent over me. I struggled against the deathlike grip of sleep, and tried to lift myself up, to move a deadened arm, to point a finger; but if I did, it went through those dirt-laden red robes into empty icy air, an instinctive though futile protest against the power trying to fetter me to this evil-smelling spectre, whose gigantic and crushing proximity was clamouring for admittance. A booming voice seemed to vibrate from the snow-clad mountains through his mouth:

'I, man, who have surmounted humanity, have overcome and discarded the world!'

The words had the clarity of snow. This emphatic statement was most startling, from the man who till now had hardly spoken, being ceaselessly engaged in running the beads of his rosary with little dull clicks through his slender grimy fingers! He sank beside me, clasped his hands round his knees, leaned back, till the shadow had swallowed his face, and continued:

'The flesh-bound idea.'

'*Oi*,' I exclaimed, in the excitement apparently produced in me by this peculiar statement, 'is not your religion a retrogression? Has it not robbed you of development, progress, motors, railways? Has it not held you in a condition of mere vegetating animalistic existence?'

'Do you not perceive our attainment,' he replied, 'in the attempt to gain liberation from this hard earth, now apportioned to us? Do you not perceive, *Pheling* (stranger),

our hourly conquest over animal nature through a negation of life, won by an inner comprehension of this nature? Did not our brothers in the north once try to evade this mystery instead of submitting to it, to their own ruin? That mounted troop of Ghenghis Khan, the Golden Horde, which scoured with swift hoofs across the world till their heads cropped up over the ramparts of your towns, like evil terrors of night, flying always from the gruesome fear of desert and steppe and nude mountains – the home of their birth – only to be dispersed, and to die without finding peace, like grass uprooted by the wind. Through this vast all-embracing desolation, a behest thunders forth from the thousand life-negating demons, who, to those that have assumed humanity, present as a fifth and highest stage of the circle of life the recognition of an esoteric path. Herein lies our development; over and above that which is human nature. Human incarnation is the stage of enthusiasm for God, our perfected brother, amidst hardship and denial, surrounded by wrathful demons, ready to overpower our human impotence. Our superstitions are nothing but a fear of God, and encourage us to strive for a heavenly reward, hoping thereby to gain the perception of a higher purpose for the human stage we are undergoing. It is the foundation of our mysterious destiny, the reason for our existence in the midst of a destructive nature, with all its alarms and adversities, over which the eternal dawn of Nirvana breaks, as a final deliverance from the circle of corporeal life ; working up to a summit the continual purpose of our humanity through the five regions of fettered existence: from pure element into mineral, from mineral into vegetable, from vegetable to the animal stage, and from animal into human. Its highest goal being the disintegration of corporeal existence by the awakened spiritual consciousness of the soul while yet in its earthly garb. An army of terrifying demons is ever seeking to emphasize, by

necessary suffering, that which our consciousness has apprehended, only to make us comprehend the illusiveness of all material life, except as a preparation for the highest.

'Our human stage reaches its summit in the divine hierarchy; embodying the step from the human to the superhuman condition. This hierarchy consists of men who throughout their human career have wielded the weapon of their higher consciousness, against bodily conditions, and have won the mastery over matter. They have earned liberation and access, through the portals of death, into the western paradise of Amithaba. There is only this, or a renewal of the terrible Sangsara, a wandering round the continuous circle that turns between death and reincarnation.'

The fire flared up, sending a lightning flash over the lama's clay-coloured face, with its deep pock-marks and perpendicular lines running down each side of his mouth. And I beheld the conflict of this soul, possessed and driven by his will-power, intent on mastering the terrors of this desert, of the storms and snows of eternally ice-bound mountains about him – awful and unconquerable elemental forces impelling life to this tremendous self-abnegation, so that the power of will may swirl upwards like a flame. The ascetic, or anchorite, becomes a meeting-point of two compensating worlds, the link between earth and heaven; this earthly life being the mysterious process that enables him to be reborn eventually as a god – the final goal of an evolution hurled into the course of the universe!

At the moment when reason seemed triumphantly to convince me that nature had been conquered through itself and by itself, the lama vanished into the darkness, as if a current of air had extinguished the circle of light in which he sat. Only his words reverberated across the snowy ice-capped distances, over a wild and desolate world.

I start up . . . had I been dreaming? My limbs are

shaken in the bitter grip of the frost-laden air. The lama? . . . I see him sitting immobile on the hoar-frost-covered ground . . . naked. Verily, his clothes have fallen in stiff frozen folds to below the waist, and his semi-nude body with thin folded arms stands out, as if made of wax, in this clear night of floating sparkling stars, where a thin sickle moon has crept above the skyline to touch all the hurrying clouds with silver. His broad face with closed eyes looks like a wooden mask under the sparkling shower of minute ice crystals, which the shrill breath of the keen wind blows about him. From his breast a deep chant booms out into the snow-illumined darkness – incongruous words, like a flock of strange birds of rare plumage. Through his smooth dirty fingers the beads of his rosary click, hesitate, and click again. About us the mossy 'bath sponges' are stiff and white with hoar-frost, and the sheets of snow have spread during the last hours, reaching down into the valley. Amidst this frozen world, the lama has urged himself into an ecstasy of concentration; impelling by sheer power of will the heat of the blood outwards to confront the icy breath of the high snowfields and glaciers. I approached him, and touched his pock-marked shoulder-blades; and it seemed as if crackling electric sparks shot from him. Drops of sweat had collected in the furrows of his forehead, and under his eyes, and about the corners of his mouth, like drops of dew.

This Gompcha (meditating ascetic) had joined our party a day or two before. Suddenly in a desolate high valley, miles from any human habitation, and devoid even of animal life, we overtook this solitary wandering dot, carrying a leather pouch and an ochre-brown skull cup. The pouch contained a small supply of dusty grey meal, and some crumbling cheese, unbelievably dirty and evil smelling, and that was all! With this provision he walked along, like a worm creeping laboriously over the desolate

face of the world; and since this meeting our paths had for a time run parallel. What mysterious faith urged this man on such a mad enterprise, through conditions that threatened to break his body, the last check to his ascending power of will? Life – physical life at least – to him is not an aim in itself, but only a necessary means of attaining the realization of higher aims, and of obtaining liberation.

On the previous evening my Tibetans had talked until late with the interpreter from Nepaul, before they turned in, rolled themselves up in their furs, and slept like hibernating sloths. I wondered if they would oversleep the time fixed for our departure, which was to be punctually at half-past two in the morning! None possessed a watch. It was nearly 1 a.m., and I deliberated whether to wake them, or whether the fresh snowfall had blocked the pass again? For in that case we should have to wait here and dream and shiver away the time, till the weather changed. But while I hesitated the lama moved, looked about him and above, his eyes reading the face of this ocean of immensity bedecked with sparkling diamonds. Then he rose, gathered his frost-hardened garments about him, and with a sympathetic glance at my shivering form began to gather dried yak dung, taking no heed of the sleepers. I sat with the collar of my fur turned up, and my breath went and came like a tiny snowfall over glassy icicles. I glance up over the immaculate snowfields to the distant ridge above, and am aware that all sense of distance is wiped out by their snowy smoothness. The top of the pass, towering into the empty void of sparkling sky, seemed close enough to touch. . . .

The men moved, arose, and came to life simultaneously. The position of the stars must have penetrated their dreams, giving the signal like an alarm clock. The Gompcha was busy blowing up a fire, and once more the shadowy forms of life moved about behind this shelter of rough stones.

With sleepy faces the Tibetans crouch round the lama and ask him to foretell the fate of our further progress. Such an opportunity to consult gods and demons, and to prove their goodwill, must not be wasted. Is their blessing granted on the hour of our departure? Are we to proceed without fear of interference from them? Will they concede us free passage of the dreaded pass? The lama stares absently into the night, and his lips murmur prayers. Then he stoops and stirs the grey ashes with his index finger, examining them in search for something. Greatest tension on all the Tibetan faces: with heads bent forward and mouths open, they follow the movements of his ash-covered finger, drawing ever new circles, while the other hand is passing the beads of the rosary with great dexterity, in slow or quick time, according to the rhythm of the prayers which flow from his lips like the constant babble of a mountain stream. The Tibetans exchange a look of satisfaction when at last the Gompcha picks out some little hard pellets and collects these on the palm of his left hand. He closes it, lays the other upon it, shakes both together, and blows upon them with inflated cheeks. He is brewing our fate! In spite of my admiration for the fanaticism of this ascetic, who at 35 degrees of frost can conjure sweat out of his thin naked body, what now takes place seems to me the greatest childishness. But the gaze of all is fixed with unshakable credulity on his rugged face, and I am thoroughly convinced that our further progress is entirely dependent on his verdict!

He opens his hand – all indications are in our favour. The Tibetans get up, happy and smiling; their courage now knows no limit. Nothing can hinder our successfully crossing the pass. No wind, no snow. Redoubled energy fills them. The power of superstition on such simple natures is truly wonderful. Coincidence is the law on which they build their undertakings, from which they draw the

courage to encounter the demons who spread pitfalls to catch them. This nomadic race exists amidst cruel aspects of nature; their elemental fantasy inspires them with a firm belief in the presence of inimical demons; and this produces that implicit faith in the oracular verdict of chance, which again enables them to surmount every obstacle. They bow before the enigma of existence and prostrate themselves in abject fear before unknown powers.

The Cradle of Buddha was placed in a land of blessed inexhaustible luxuriance of vegetation, requiring no human aid. Amidst such abundance this royal son of a monarch attained the liberating wisdom of emancipation. Beyond the sparkling ice-encrusted girdle of the Himalayas to the north, Tibet, with its lofty glaciers and stony deserts sloping up to the roof of the world, was the geographical cause which led men to contemplation of those everlasting facts of necessity and want, of raving, terrifying, elemental forces and demons which permeate the natural religion of Mongolia and Tibet and compel man's subordination. Nirvana in India was the product of satiety and superabundance; in Tibet it was produced by want and deprivation, as the only refuge from all the terrors of this crude belief.

. . . . .

We prepare for our departure. The Tibetan winds a long folded cloth girdlewise very closely round his loins over the sheepskin coat. The coat above the waist thus becomes a loose commodious sacklike receptacle. Between the fur and his bare skin he carries all he may require on his journey; dried meat, a brick of tea, a stony crust of cheese; everything well saturated in sweat, and, to judge from appearances, acting as a cleanser to the body. Prayer-wheels, amulets, whatever he possesses or acquires, gets stuffed into the paunch that sags wide over his girdle.

Their toilet completed, the two yak drivers take up their catapults and set out to round up the animals. These slings are curious implements, merely a piece of leather with a cord attached at each end. One end of the cord runs between the first and second finger, and is held tight, the other end is held by thumb and first finger. In the loop between, a lump of lead or a stone the size of an egg is placed. This is first swung to and fro like a pendulum, then spun round and round above the head, till with a leap forward the end between the thumb and finger is let go, and the whirling missile flies at a tangent with tremendous impetus, and can reach the almost unbelievable distance of three or four hundred yards, hitting the ground like a bullet and raising a puff of dust. The throwing of this missile is a sheer matter of intuitive judgment, but in expert hands it reaches its aim with a devilish precision. I have seen hares and pigeons knocked to pieces at a distance of over two hundred paces.

Yak herdsmen use these catapults for rounding up or arresting their animals. One of these shots hitting the ground close by, or whizzing overhead, frightens the animal, so that with wild leaps it dives into the safety of the herd. My two men wander in different directions over the hoar-frosted clumps of moss to where the yaks are engaged in scraping away the snow with their hoofs under the steaming breath of their dilated nostrils. Now and again the herdsmen stoop for a stone and swing their slings above their heads with shrill cries and quick forward jerks. The night air is rent by the whizzing noises of the bolts, as they deftly herd up the animals. These black couches now suddenly start to life in wild leaps, and trot snorting towards our camp, where they cluster together with staring eyes. Their short snubby snouts seem as though freshly dipped in violet ink, and on the dewy curve of lip and nostril the wiry hairs stand out stiffly and as though silvered with

hoar-frost. On a pad of wool the wooden pack-saddle is adjusted, the loads hoisted to each side by the help of a knee pressed into the animal's ribs, and corded on, with an antelope's horn pushed in to hold the slip knot. Once adjusted, the weight falls slanting to each side and cannot slip.

But occasionally the stoical calm of one of these grunting oxen breaks into a lightning protest against the burden, or the maladjustment of the pack. Then with wild leaps, that would convulse a circus audience with laughter, it tries to get rid of its pack. The black tassels of its coat toss about, flinging up the snow in sparkling clouds as it curvets and buckjumps in a wild access of fury. My Tibetans have a lot of trouble over one of these buckjumping couches. They shout and swear and hang on to the pack in an attempt to damp down the ardour of the leaping animal, but are flung off; and the couch goes on buckjumping until it has shed everything. Then the yak gives a grunt of satisfaction, and licks his chops with an artful tongue. The Gompcha watches the whole show as if it were the first time in his life that a yak caravan had been loaded up in his sight. He lives far from the ways of the world; his leather pouch and skull cup suffice for all his requirements, and he seems amazed that so many things should be deemed necessary to daily life.

Before long we leave the valley and proceed up the gentle slope. Frozen moss crackles under our feet as we mount slowly towards those white stretches formed by great swelling drifts of snow, but looking like flat surfaces tilted aslant, and lit up by the silver light of the sickle moon. An almost unreal brilliance illuminates the night, obliterating all distances. Points of light gleam here and there before us on this sheet of snow; but as we approach they seem to recede, keeping the same distance; provoking me to estimate the time it will take to reach one, which moves

as I move. Where nothing more seems possible, new expanses unfold, enormous capped peaks rise behind the pass, which, viewed from the valley, seemed the highest point of the world, where one expected spaceless eternity to open to one's gaze.

Fierce winds sweep the powdered snow from the rounded peaks into huge drifts, filling out all the steeps and hollows. The valley from which we started lies far below, almost at our feet. It can hardly be distinguished at this distance from the general whiteness in which it is sunk. The crescent moon has crept along its allotted curve, in the great balance of time that moves the scintillating stars overhead with invisible fingers. The minute figures of our caravan, creeping upwards, form as it were the apex of a pyramidal blue shadow, which glides like a long streak behind them over the receding ground. The air blows keener. From both sides ridges have pushed out props that lift the slanting plane of our ascent more sharply, and the wind swirls unhindered across the snowfields, raising whirling eddies of snow. The tip of the moon's horn touches the skyline, sinks slowly below its snowy covering, and then is gone. But the stars sparkle with ever brighter and colder brilliance, and the very snow seems to radiate light. Marvellous is this night amongst the high mountains, with the wind drawing harplike tones from the heights around. In forgotten depths below lies the valley of yesterday, and far above us the way to the pass winds upwards over ever new expanses.

Now the sky above the horizon in the east grows pale, and dawn, neutral and cold, creeps across the night like moisture on a wall. On a solitary peak above I see the first stone cairn in the pale light of dawn. The stars fade and are drowned in the grey oceans of space; only one persists for a while in the ever paler veils of light, till even that diamond point vanishes. The stone cairn, a few

hundred yards distant, is stuck all over with branches and poles, from which thousands of tattered prayer-banners flutter and rustle in the mountain air, giving it the appearance of a clump of battered banana trees with their leaves split and torn into grey shreds by the wind, and all combed in one direction. My men dive into their comprehensive breast pouches for prayer-wheels and rosaries, and the steadily mounting lama drones his prayers in a deep unmusical voice. Now our group is caught by the fierce blasts that rake over the saddle, and the Gompcha's voice is snatched out of his mouth and swallowed by the gigantic panorama.

Then a shrill burst of joyous voices: 'The gods have won.' The men fall forward, and dig their hands in the dust, turn and circle about, swinging handfuls of sand above their heads, and throwing them over their shoulders. The Gompcha draws a line in the sand with his pilgrim's staff. Each man adds a handful of stones to the cairn, and fastens a prayer-banner to the poles. The pass is crossed! The ghosts and demons, banished by the gods of goodwill to these forsaken heights, have been outwitted; so the joyous Tibetans circle three times round the cairn rotating their prayer-wheels.

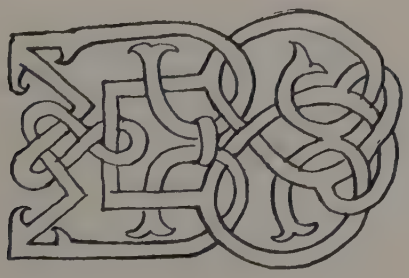
As daylight strengthens, shafts of the sunbeams shoot over the eastern heights, and our moving bodies throw an endless shadow before them. In the boundless prospect spread about us all minor troubles – the catching breath, the throbbing heart, the aching head – are forgotten. We stand 19,000 feet above sea level! Before us are spread barren expanses, valleys, and snow-crowned summits, cut by deep blue furrows, repeated without end, yet distinct and crystal clear to the eye as far as it can travel. The view sweeps up unhindered to the highest peaks bathed in the pink of sunrise and supporting great banks of clouds flushed to a deep rosy red. The roof of the world!

THE PASS

Below us lies the precipitous ridge of the pass and its cairn, already shrunken into a sharp edge, or a stray unattached jawbone. From where we stand a steep gravel incline slopes down, swept bare of snow by the wind, which in a sudden gust of fury now pelts our faces with sand and little stones.

A world devoid of all human life. I look at the anchorite beside me, a creation of this forceful soil, the symbol of a solitary, faith-intoxicated soul, surmounting every limitation of the flesh, in quest of a mystic union with God. Up here the words of my dream seem full of clear significance. In him my Tibetans recognize the highest product of their humanity; for had they not asked him to determine our destiny, willing to submit to his verdict?

After we had journeyed together for two days, and while traversing a windswept desolate region, this lama left us, vanishing as suddenly as he had come. To my query, the others pointed towards distant peaks, beyond the glaciers, to which my recollection of a memorable experience now flies. These strange men of Tibet seem capable of accomplishing the impossible.



THE FOOL'S PARADISE

TODAY the Tibetan race, with its mental outlook shaped by the severe conditions of its natural environment, is being compelled to face about. Storm clouds from the south and north are coming up against this desolate country, and it is forced to descend from its former heights of spiritual exclusiveness, and turn its attention to mundane matters. Upon a purely esoteric basis of life, the priestly hierarchy has worked its way to power, and to the absolute guidance of the race; but on materialistic and practical levels a retrogression has without doubt occurred. Their neighbours on both sides manipulated life from an entirely different mental angle, and gradually formed an opposing force strong enough finally to destroy the Tibetan cosmogony of gods and demons. For the last thousand years the teaching of Buddhism has deadened in this race every positive acquiescence in life. Their original beliefs were the outcome of incomparably great and severe conditions of nature, its terrible acts of violence inspiring them with a vividly fantastic belief in the presence of adverse spirits and demons. Buddhistic teaching showed them the way to liberation from bodily suffering, by renunciation. This turning away from a world of strife has weakened their power of expansion and growth, and they are unable to withstand the pressure of materialism from without. They have either to accept the same level on which the possibility of self-assertion lies, or to perish.

The religious conviction of Tibet is derived from purely natural sources and was moulded from without into a

Utopia unable to cope with the happenings and demands of the present. To the north-east the Chinese dragon flashed its threatening colours, casting an eye on this wild ram of Tibet with its large unwieldy horns, heavy to carry and useless in battle. In the bamboo jungles of the southern slopes of the Himalayas the British tiger was crouching in wait, alert, his eye turned likewise towards these high regions. Should the dragon pounce upon his victim, a fierce struggle for the tiger's existence might ensue, and he had trouble enough to maintain this on a strong footing.

All the vitality and spirit in Tibet had been practically atrophied by its persistent striving for purely spiritual possessions. The wielding of arms was futile in the struggle for an existence which their religion had from the first been at pains to disparage, and the value of which the Buddhistic teaching had completely overthrown. Therefore its fighting instinct was quite rudimentary, and had needs to be remedied, now that spiritual values were to be defended.

In 1904 the British tiger bared its strong teeth in the face of the wild ram of Tibet. A letter was sent from the Viceroy of India to the Priest-King of Tibet, with an invitation to enter into friendly relations. It was left unanswered. A second more urgent repetition of the request was returned to the sender unopened, in token of the utterly unworldly attitude of the ruling hierarchy of Tibet. The tiger saw his well-meant purpose scorned, and was about to spring. The effect was disastrous. The Priest-King and his following, driven by the same unworldly innocence that had precipitated this thunderstorm, turned to flight over the cold deserts and mountains of the north towards Urga, the capital of outer Mongolia.

China had always considered itself entitled to a first claim on Tibet, and encouraged the Tibetans in their desire – on a purely *religious* basis – to avoid the arch-

enemy in the south as they would avoid the plague. But now that the spiritual leader of Tibet had flown, the dragon snatched at the empty lair, over every hindrance, if only to convince the tiger that it had long held the ram in its claws. The Tali-Lama was deposed by China. This opened the eyes of the Tibetans as to their power of free-will, and the pendulum of their unworldly mood began to swing the other way, distrust having given the incentive. They denied China's power to depose their Tali-Lama, and unanimously withstood these sudden signs of a supposed right of interference in the Tibetan household. Armed interference of England in Tibet had not usurped the power of domination, but had solved the situation by withdrawing its troops into India. The disappointed officer in command was recalled from the country he had practically captured by the occupation of its capital, Lhasa. Yet contact had thus been made, though it did not result in friendly relations. This temporary disturbance of Tibetan domestic peace by its southern neighbour did not cause as great resentment as might be expected, as there had been no interference in religious matters, and this was greatly appreciated. England had cleared out, but Tibet lay more helpless than ever in the full glare of the veiled eye of China. A yellow skin, common to both nations, and their territorial position as neighbours from time immemorial seem binding links; but these links no longer hold, when we consider the character of each as an outcome of the characteristics of the soil and climate which bred him and on which he lives, for we can observe the nature of a region expressing itself in all the life upon it, down to the smallest creatures; and man is no exception. The idea of racial connection is quite external. The people inhabiting a country will exhibit as much mental variety as the scenery shows changes over the same stretch of country. This points to a parentage of profound causes from which the creature springs. A

country's original character and its variety express themselves in the character, customs, and even costumes of the people who inhabit it, as well as in their actions. These are but the symbols of the character nature imprints on an individual; the ethical values it yields him constitute his individuality and his religious concepts.

The Tibetans' faith in their powerful neighbour to the north-east overrode reason because of similar outward features, but showed only too clearly in its results that such a surface connection could in no way be relied on in practice. The Tibetan mentality proved that it had definite frontiers to the north as well as to the south. Individualism and mental outlook triumphed over the yellow complexion common to both, and demonstrated that the yellow-skinned Chinese was as foreign to Tibet as the white-skinned European.

Six years later – in 1910 – the yellow dragon had netted his victim! Chinese soldiers overran Tibet. The Tali-Lama fled, this time to India, and was definitely deposed by China, regardless of the outraged feelings of the Tibetans, whom the Chinese now obviously considered unworthy of consideration or notice. Ruling them by strength of arms, and bent only on furthering her own interests, China refused to respect the holiest possessions of Tibet!

England was the first to answer the Tali-Lama's cry for speedy help, and she did so with a deliberate and icy smile. In the innocence of his unworldly heart, the Tali-Lama had even appealed to the Tsar of Russia. Inexperienced and unspoilt, this honest soul thought in its need it would find an equally honest friend. He thought that with his own affairs the whole world-order was hanging in the balance, and had no inkling of the artificial network of politics spun by the fierce fight for existence and self-interest around his own country. The result he had counted on did not occur. He began to realize that the Russian agents in his country

were lying when they assured him that all Russia had embraced his religion; and it dawned upon him gradually that, confronted by a crushing majority, his ideal world was a slippery rock, washed by a rising tide. What will have been the feelings of this man, a monarch in his realm of priests, when, from his refuge on the edge of the Darjeeling ghauts, he gazed every morning up to the gleaming ice-covered heights of the Himalayas, rearing their rosy peaks from the misty valleys below, in startling loftiness, where the eye expects to find the heavens; where blizzards sweep in organ tones over the eternal snows; where the symphony of creation discarded life from its highest regions; while down about him life seethed and fermented. Did he realize, surrounded by a different spirit, by the very necessity of calling for help from without, that in course of time his world, by its aloofness and seclusion, had become a fool's paradise? His world, facing only towards spiritual issues, in the midst of a swirling stream of materialism – how long could it hold out against these thundering floods? A toothless creature, confronted by animals of prey – woe to it, when they should come to feel the pangs of hunger!

England marked time and gave China ample rope – watching its interests carefully and strengthening its hand, the more Tibet showed a will to free itself from the Chinese yoke. A conviction took root in Tibet that the neighbour in the north-east was after all its arch-enemy! What England's armed penetration of Tibet had not accomplished present circumstances brought about. The Tali-Lama spent two and a half years in exile in India during this period, and His Holiness was gradually led to some understanding of the worldly elements in the white race. Circumstances forced him into the advantage and disadvantage of a compromise. The helplessness of his country against forcible handling cried for armed protection, which was again quite contrary to the dogmas of Tibetan religion.

The Tali-Lama had, in fact, descended considerably from his altitudes of spiritual isolation, and plunged into the realities of today, when he began to entertain such ideas. China's rough thrust had shown him that to maintain its existence at all, half of his realm would have to acknowledge and pursue materialistic aims. These opposing powers, thus forced on him by dire necessity, gnashed their teeth at each other, and meanwhile corruption threw contempt on the Tali-Lama's endeavour. The unshakable faith of the Tibetans in the divine incarnation of Amithaba in the person of the Tali-Lama, and their conviction that they were ruled by a god, was being undermined by doubt. China had given large presents of money to the five most powerful monasteries of Tibet, to balance the account of their depredations elsewhere, and had therefore in a great measure bought the allegiance of the Tibetan hierarchy.

From these monasteries the persecution of the Tali-Lama began, and was readily made to spread amongst a completely subjugated people, always a field of easy exploitation. The largest monastery of Tibet, Drepung, has about seven thousand monks, of whom a third are of Chinese-Tibetan origin, coming from the obliterated boundary line to the north. This, as well as the monastery of Teng Ye-ling, openly persecuted the Tali-Lama. But behind the straightforward resentment and horror with which this religion condemned any connection with worldly affairs, especially in their chief – though this argument alone was used against the Tali-Lama – there were other factors, unconnected with this fanatical faith. The real cause was a very human struggle for power of a priesthood bent on their own advantage, and whose organization had already become greatly diluted and adulterated. Intrigue, jealousy, and quarrels started, each monk trying to weaken the influence and power of the other. Now that the Tali-Lama had fled, those remaining in Tibet hastened

to strengthen their own cause by disparaging the absent Tali-Lama, while he was gaining insight into the politics of the outer world. They said that he was obscuring the true light of the holy religion; and things were about to take a bad turn for His Holiness when the Chinese dragon became convulsed by internal revolution. The Chinese troops in Tibet were disbanded and became freebooters, penetrating into monasteries, and plundering and murdering with true Chinese zest.

But during his two and a half years' exile the Tali-Lama's courage had been greatly strengthened, and he had gained much useful knowledge by contemplating his world from outside. He now hurried back, and with an iron hand soon set his house in order, leaning for support on the friendly shoulder of his southern neighbour. The immediate change in Tibet was astounding. The marauding Chinese were killed, the higher lamas of the monastery of Drepung were executed, the abbot of Teng Ye-ling had an iron collar weighing a hundredweight clamped round his neck, crushing his life out by inches. The Tali-Lama rose to new vigour and glory. It was even mooted that the Chinese usurpation had been due to his former apathy. As Priest-King he had begun according to the dogmas of his religion, by forbidding active resistance by his people. Now his battle-cry echoed across Tibet. But this contradiction to which he had been driven was like the weak spot in Siegfried's horny covering. If we consider how completely the soul of the Tibetan race is bound by a blind faith in the hierarchy, we gain some idea of the unquestioning respect with which the ordinary man faces a priest. The abbot of Teng Ye-ling was looked on as a father of the people, as was every abbot of his position. The punishment that ended his human life did not alter the feeling of love and veneration given to him, or to the other monks who were forcibly removed. Wherever that antipole to the Tali-

Lama, the Tashi-Lama, appeared on the scene, the people, usually stoic in their reserve, would weep tears of deepest feeling. No one heeded the human weaknesses inherent in these incarnations, but was carried away by blind faith in their superhuman divinity – no matter what they did or left undone. This unreasoning faith enabled the Tali-Lama to change his tactics completely, since now that he was present the people obeyed him as blindly as in his absence they had responded to the hierarchy's intrigues against him. The necessity of maintaining armed power – a very literal innovation in Tibet – demanded a further change on more worldly lines. Tsarong Shap-pe, a Tibetan civilian of low rank, had been successful in preventing the Chinese from capturing the Tali-Lama, when they were close upon his heels in his flight to India. This man became the Tali-Lama's absolute and obedient tool for giving practical effect to those impetuous and material influences which had forced themselves on his notice during his exile, and had so greatly changed his views. This servant was in the truest sense the natural medium through which the wishes of his master found execution. He had proved his devotion in preserving the holy life of his master at the risk of his own; but the wise conclusions of the greatly superior lord found their reflection in the servant in a foolhardy enthusiasm that was ready to ride over every natural and even necessary barrier. This man was made the chief of the Tibetan army, a post quite new in a country where rank and dignity had hitherto been looked for only in the priesthood. Tsarong Shap-pe embodied the worldly views of the Tali-Lama, who was himself fully convinced that his religion had specially granted him this friend in order that he might actively defend his precious trust. This servant accordingly became the unfortunate tool of the Western tendencies of his master, the conductor through which the lightning current of Western thought shot from

the gathering clouds. He was, however, not only the medium of his master's wishes, but gradually became the tool of English interests as well. These influenced him, and soon through him dominated the Tali-Lama. Though the innovations began guardedly, they grew apace. Importation of machinery, complete modernization of Tibet – England delivering the goods. Transports laden with machinery were camped at Sikkim, that state under English protection on the southern frontier of Tibet, awaiting the opening of the passes to penetrate into the heart of Tibet. Tsarong Shap-pe had begun as the medium of his master's natural wish for self-protection, but soon became the means of breaking or surmounting all obstacles against England. The genie, once freed from the bottle, assumed gigantic proportions, and the Tali-Lama himself may have observed the results with growing amazement and horror.

Though England held herself aloof from any direct interference in the religious problems of Tibet, her action had broken the guard which this religion had reared against the materialistic influence of the outer world. The cry for help of the Tali-Lama when he saw his spiritual kingdom in danger, was answered in all friendliness; for England had won an important point in establishing friendly intercourse with a closed country, which, if not an open enemy, had hitherto not been friendly to British interests. This contact, now firmly established, was to be gradually expanded, once the spiritual head of the kingdom had come into direct contact with Western civilization, and was being carried along by its impetus. The Tali-Lama was given every opportunity of feeling flattered by the respect and deference tendered to his religion – its safeguarding having been the object of his call for help. This consideration was pointedly and constantly kept in the foreground, and the Tibetan's imagination had free rein to interpret the

new friendship in whatever terms he pleased. There are tales abroad in Tibet from which I gathered that the people there sincerely believe themselves to be the patrons of England. During the war it prayed steadily for England's victory with rotating prayer-wheels and waving banners. This attitude is encouraged when the British Agent deals personally with the Tali-Lama. But was the Tali-Lama also of this opinion? It is possible. He had lived half a lifetime aloof and excluded from the outer world; and it was only in the latter part of his life that he threw a few groping roots into the air beyond his frontiers. But his mentality sprang from an environment difficult to comprehend by those who are shackled to the yoke of materialism. He hailed from surroundings which had for centuries severed every link with the course of the world outside, and had developed along completely other lines. The Tibetan contemplated the world through Tibetan eyes. To our mind, Tibet was a backward country: according to their idea, ours was on the down grade, for the two had developed in opposing directions.

While the Tali-Lama was in India the British Agent was able to persuade him to allow four young Tibetan lads of good standing, aged between nine and twelve years, to be educated in England; an indigenous element would thus be schooled on Western lines and become the medium for commercial relations. This Utopian attempt to surmount race problems, to steer an individual into mental currents contrary to all his traditions, proved abortive. The result was an intermediate creature, neither European nor Asian, equipped with a superficial knowledge of a purely European culture, to the deeper currents of which he would always remain an alien.

I met one of these young men at Sikkim in 1924, and could only smile at the mutilated results, dressed in English clothes – apparently an achievement of European missionizing

attempts. This young Tibetan engineer had partly forgotten his mother tongue; he had perhaps tried to find new convictions, a new aim in Europe, but had only managed to fall into the vacuum between two utterly opposed points of view, and was filled with vanity and self-esteem. He had hardly returned to his mother country after completing his studies abroad, when, in showing off a motor-cycle with boastful swagger to his companions, he ran into a tree and broke his arm. Was the finger of Providence at work in this mishap, thereby interfering with plans that were contrary to the spirit of the country? This young man was being awaited at Sikkim by the transports laden with machinery, and their departure was delayed by his accident. Meanwhile the feeling in Tibet against all these innovations had time to grow into active objection. A new financial scheme to raise the necessary grist for the military mill, emptied the money-bags of several monasteries and roused the indignation of the spiritual authorities. Shigatze had revolted against the tax demanded from it, and the Panchen-Lama (the very antipole to the materialistic tendencies of Lhasa) fled, well protected by his devoted followers across the cold Tchan-tang to Peking, seeking the hospitality of China which, with the exception of a few unimportant interferences on the eastern frontier, had since 1910 been pushed out of Tibet by British influence. A new and unexpected situation!

Then Tsarong Shap-pe, that hated tool of Western influence with his continual cry for 'modernization,' died very suddenly – and his spirit called for vengeance! There were rumours of various imprisonments and executions. All this took place while the transports laden with English machinery lay at Gangtok, awaiting the young Tibetan's escort to proceed into Tibet.

About this time I had been trying in vain to get permission

to enter Tibet. My request followed the usual way of official routine between England and Tibet. It passed through the hands of the political officer, and I doubt whether it ever reached Lhasa, or if it did, probably with a marginal note in my disfavour. I perceived that England, except in its own interests, encouraged Tibet's aloofness to all foreign contact, so by means of a ruse I crossed the northern point of the Sikkim frontier into Tibet. I soon gathered that discontent was seething to a head in this country. While travelling through southern Tibet a week or two later, I noticed gatherings of lamas in secret conclave at several places; and the point of discussion must have been those transports lying at Gangtok, though my interpreter assured me they were planning war with England. Only specially-chosen lamas from neighbouring monasteries were allowed to be present, and the strictest secrecy was preserved. No native would ever act against the wish of a lama, so I tried to investigate one of these conclaves on my own account. It was about midnight, and the village lay bathed in silvery moonlight, sound asleep and closely barred, for evil spirits roam at night. Even a caravan of about a hundred donkeys and their drivers carrying wool to India, the only people who use the windstill nights for their travels, lay unsaddled and resting within a stone-walled enclosure in the village place. In the guise of a tired wayfarer I came up to the particular house, not greatly different from its neighbours, in which the gathering was taking place, when a lama hidden in the shadow asked me what I wanted. Saying '*Tsay*' (tea), I pushed past him, lifted the door-flap, and entered a short narrow passage that led to a low smoke-browned room, in which fourteen lamas sat round a fire. All were wrapped in greasy and torn garments, and were telling the beads of their rosaries. The lama from outside followed me, and stood behind me in the doorway. The word '*Pheling*' (stranger) flashed round

this mysterious assembly like lightning, and all stared at me with open-mouthed amazement. I bowed, and pointed to a large black tea-kettle, making the gesture of drinking and asking for tea, when a curious thing happened. The standing lama sprang forward and pushed me out of the place, breaking this sacred and time-honoured form of hospitality. I hastened back to my camp intending to fetch the interpreter, but he refused to come, and begged that I would give up such dangerous attempts. He still insisted that war with England was the topic of their discussion. Though incorrect, the popular rumour was not entirely wide of the mark, as events showed; for three months later a report reached me, that when the transports laden with machinery finally entered Tibet, they were attacked, those in charge killed, and the transports and all they contained of British machinery hurled over the precipice. This was how the lamas of Tibet used their clenched fist. They were going to defend their authority by every possible means, even with the poison which was hidden in the shadow of Tibetan mysticism, and of which Tsarong Shap-pe had been a chosen victim.

In regard to poison, there was an occult sect of the pre-Buddhistic Boën religion, and its dark horrors have crept down to the present day. They proceed with devilish cunning and cool calculation, the unsuspecting victim being handed a bowl in friendly hospitality, and in no way permitted to refuse it without causing the deepest offence. A few hours before his death Tsarong Shap-pe had been the guest of a high lama; and the same thing happened to a young Mongol, Sucha Bator, a scholar from Moscow, who proclaimed the republic in Mongolia. His body, covered with black spots, was taken back to Moscow, but the doctors searched in vain for traces – for some poison unknown to Western science had been used. Russian bullets put an end to the lamas suspected of this murder, after every

effort to extort their secret from them had been made in vain. No foreigner has ever seen this poison, though one may be aware of its presence in the pocket of one's friend. There is a curious sect of men and women in Tibet in whose possession this poison is hereditary, and when called upon to do so, they have at once to administer it to the first person available. Should there be no stranger handy, one of the family, or even the possessor of the poison must take it. Such are the decrees of the demon-ridden soul of the Tibetan people!

In some valleys, owing to a cold and obstinate winter, the herds had dwindled down almost to extinction; and such animals as had been spared by snowstorms and hunger became the victims of a raging cattle disease. The nomadic herdsmen never think of leaving the infected pastures, but call to the lamas for help. I once witnessed one of these exorcisms. A bevy of redcoats came one evening with drums, conches, collapsible tubas, and trumpets made of human shin-bones. A yak cow, staggering on shaking knees, was brought and tied up. The lamas sat round it, and started a frightful din of drumming, tuba-groaning, and conch-blowing, augmented vocally by a chorus of incantations. The church of Tibet was inflating the lungs of its powerful body over a dying yak cow! The poor creature soon sank to the ground, heaved a deep sigh, and with a few spasmodic jerks gave up the ghost. This in no way affected the noisy incantations, which on the contrary increased to frenzy point and continued till a red moon rose over the eastern hills and climbed along its high path across the sky.

To obtain the blessing of a high lama, no trouble or hardship is too great, and the people will not spare themselves, even in the most adverse seasons of the year, in undertaking a long journey to gain this blessing from one said to be specially holy and powerful. This seems their chief object in life. I have come upon pilgrims from the north of Mongolia, who did the journey from Urga to Lhasa, a distance of about two thousand odd miles, crawling

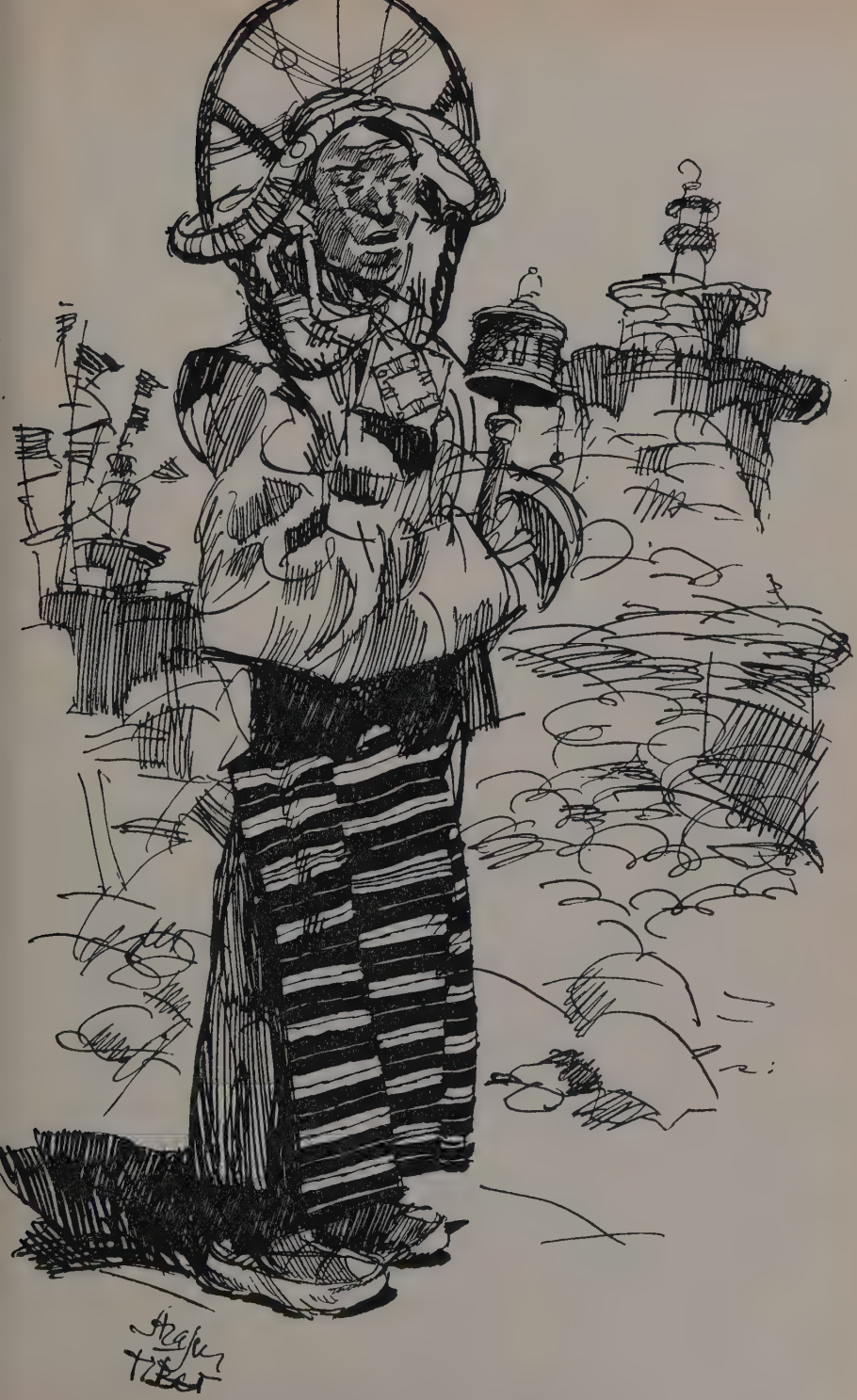
on all-fours. They would take three steps forward on hands and feet, then halt kneeling, and with folded hands touch breast and forehead, and throw themselves flat on their faces in the dust. Thus they moved in a long chain of bruised and dust-covered human worms, crawling across a desert of sand and stone, where there was no sign of human habitation. Their lips were parched to a deep violet, and their skins tanned and shrivelled by hot sand and icy frost. To our questions they were dumb, for silence is imposed upon them during their pilgrimages. Unceasingly they muttered: '*Om mani padme hum*,' with hoarse and cracked voices.

In far Lhasa, behind the clear blue haze of distant valleys and mountain chains, if, more dead than alive, they ever reach it, the Tali-Lama, that divinity reincarnated in human form for the good of mankind, may grant them his blessing. There they will acquire a holy fetish, in the shape of some mud which the feet of the Tali-Lama has touched; and this they carry henceforth in little bags round their necks, dangling on their naked chests, and upon its wonder-working power the dim light of their faith is centred. Thus the decrees of the gods, through their earthly representatives, the lamas, dominate the people utterly.

But it is obvious that these lamas seldom rise in their devotions to divine contemplation and spiritual abstraction. They are too often immersed in a struggle of self-interest, amidst terrible abuses within the clerical fold. The Tibetan concept of life is still Shamanistic. A personal representative of good or evil is worshipped or hated, quite apart from his character and life. His person simply embodies the divine idea. This attitude is strengthened by the purely mechanical methods of prayer: the turning of a prayer-wheel, or the telling the beads of a rosary by rote and without an intelligent cooperation of the mind and will. Wherever possible, strips of cloth with prayers written

upon them are attached to poles, and flutter the prayers into the wind. Lamas of high degree and dignity at times prophesy in occult words their reincarnation for the good of mankind at this or that place, before they depart to heavenly spheres. The immediate *entourage* of a lama must never question him concerning his next incarnation, or they might arouse his longing to leave this world! The oracle of Netchung at Lhasa, as well as some lamas of high rank and sanctity, and abbots of large monasteries, will at times describe the country where the departing soul of an ordinary person will be reincarnated. Births that take place amid strange happenings of nature, and spiritual visions of mothers, are of great importance. Strange birthmarks, fleshy outgrowths which are taken for rudimentary signs of Chen-Resi's four arms, reddish tiger stripes, and other such marks are all considered unmistakable proofs of divinity. The present Tali-Lama is said to have several of these signs on his person. Watery eyes are said to be a sign of Buddhahood; hence the late Hutuktu's eyes filmed by cataract were an especial token of holiness. Value is attached to the outer person quite apart from mentality or character. He is simply the object embodying a divine idea in nature. Perhaps before long a bath-tub or a trouser button will be accorded the same veneration in Tibet! In no other country does man embody to the same degree the sharp division of lower instincts and a higher will; the latter showing only in the wish to attain divine contemplation and to be uplifted above the hardships of life. This contemplation the Tibetan considers as a thing apart from his animal instincts, from which either he shakes himself free, or else suppresses, according to primitive rules, into mere vegetating existence.

There are villages built on an enormous dung heap, from which a stench arises like a cloud to the sky. To prove the harmlessness of such pestilential exudations, a religion of



A TIBETAN WOMAN FROM KAMPA-DZONG

complete abnegation is built up, which regards dirt in every form as a thing of no account. The dwelling-room of a family is bedroom, kitchen, and stable in one. The outer walls of the house are plastered with wet cow dung, and as it dries and falls off it is used for fuel. But whatever the animals drop indoors is trodden into the ground, which in course of years rises higher and higher, and on this the family reposes in peaceful slumber. Dirt to the Tibetan being non-existent, our European ideas of health and progress based on purely materialistic lines and ideas do not appeal to him or affect his well-being. Tibetan religion demands no outward or active expression. It is a mental concept that annuls life, exhausts its powers within its limitations, and merely persists in passive resistance, balancing on a dead point. I very much doubt whether any admixture of Western materialistic views, however tactfully introduced, could blend with such concepts. We too are ruled by certain natural laws, and each time we fail to be guided by them we experience a check. A lion can never convert a lamb to his diet, however eloquent he may be.

The law that prohibits the taking of life is very strictly observed in Tibet – especially in regard to insect life. I have often watched their daily hunt for vermin in the folds of their clothing, which abundant harvest they then deposit unharmed on the ground. The only Tibetan who had no need to do this was the Gompcha who was able to meditate in a state of nudity at 35 degrees of frost, for on him and his garments every insect was frozen.

Tibetan dogs are a plague. They swarm round every human settlement, and are held sacred, for they are the scavengers that devour the dead, corpses being laid out in the open for them. Any stranger trying to approach a village in Tibet or Mongolia should carry a supply of stones, or a stout long-handled whip, for the dogs will attack him

like wolves. In the monasteries, rock-pigeons nest in thousands, and are almost tame; and in their enclosures wild-fowl and hares are often found; even graceful antelopes or stately stags stalk about these yards on delicate fetlocks, like tame animals in a menagerie. But this non-killing of animals is a sterile law awaking no kindliness or feeling of consideration in the people. Only a fear of rousing the anger of the gods keeps the Tibetan from actually killing an animal; yet those in his care, if not his own property, are mercilessly abused. As long as their loss does not affect the individual in charge, one may witness marvels of cruel treatment. A badly adjusted pack-saddle will cause galls on the withers that are never attended to, which grow and deepen by daily use, often until the ribs are exposed. Imagine the tortures of the unfortunate animal under such a yoke or saddle. If it collapses from sheer pain and exhaustion, it is belaboured with kicks and whips until merely to escape the blows the poor panting beast may rise from the ground with its load and stagger a few yards, to fall again, until they abandon it to its fate, never dreaming of putting an end to its misery. They did not even always wait for its death before skinning it or cutting off parts of its flesh.

Caravans laden with salt travelling from Tchan-tang are often months on the way. They may consist of about five or six hundred goats or sheep in charge of two shepherds, and during the whole journey their loads are never taken off. On reaching their destination it may happen that the sacks are grown into the matted fur, or on to an encrusted wound; but in unloading, these are brutally torn off with lumps of flesh adhering. So when such herds are being unloaded the air is atremble with cries of agony. What is the value of a law which respects life, and yet in no way results in love or consideration for living creatures?

On the wide and barren reaches of this country the

people live mainly on animal flesh, which is usually taken from carcasses of animals that die of cold or starvation. During the winter months these are plentiful, and in the cold, dry, antiseptic atmosphere of Tibet, if not attacked by vultures or wolves, they remain a long time in a state of preservation, and the meat is quite wholesome, though not very inviting. The milk of yak, goat, sheep, or cow is mixed with *tsamba* – a kind of meal, then moistened with tea and rolled into hard balls, so dark that one presumes the hands of the manipulators must have become quite clean in the process.

At Kampa-Dzong I was once given a present of ten eggs, and responded to this truly handsome gift by presenting the giver with a patent steel saw. A week later, having guarded these precious eggs like the apple of my eye, imagine my disappointment when I tackled the first egg and it burst with a crack, emitting some blackish powder. I threw it away and tackled the second, with the same ludicrous result. The third did likewise and, my temper rising, I called alternately for my patent steel saw and the interpreter. Only the latter came, of course, and remarked that I was the first to try to eat such eggs. A present of this kind was far too precious to be broken, and should only be passed on. Had I worn a hat, I ought to have taken it off to these eggs. They were Tibetan eggs, white, smooth, of a slender oval form, like a perfect drop – far too beautiful to break, and much too rare. Their rarity encouraged veneration, and veneration led to meditation. For us mere eggs – for the Tibetan a concept of the universe. . . .

Tibetan dirt, unbelievable and terrible dirt, is by its mere existence connected with sanctity, and a traveller moving for months through this country becomes slowly inured to its inevitability. A daily bath during such a journey, apart from technical difficulties, spells disaster, as I experienced

myself. On this high plateau the extremely dry atmosphere and the very great variation of temperature act like a rasp to the skin, and only a greasy surface can withstand its wear and tear. An ordinary European skin is little suited to these climatic conditions. At first one struggles against this dirt, but inch by inch one has to give ground, and finally realizes that it is the only means of protection against such conditions. And so dirt comes into its own! Absolutely against the grain of ordinary traditions of cleanliness, it proves the only protective safeguard available – even against the vermin. During my bathing period vermin nearly devoured me; but once I had become more reasonable this nuisance shrank to bearable dimensions.

One's palate has to go through the same education, which subsequently, and viewed from other surroundings, may seem very revolting. The chief item of food is brick-tea, its binding element being horse dung! It is prepared with an alkaline salt, butter, and milk. When mixed with a handful of *tsamba* (meal) it makes a thickish soup, which varies in taste according to the quality of the ingredients used. One cannot do without this, and soon learns to be glad of a bowlful at every opportunity that offers.

Despite the Tibetan law of not killing, in uninhabited areas I usually provided a good supply of fresh game; but there were occasions when I was forced to partake of pot-luck in a Tibetan family. From the odours emitted from the cooking-pots on such occasions, I gathered that the meat, or unwashed entrails they contained, were taken from carcasses in a state of decomposition. But the pangs of a wolfish hunger can overcome a good deal of natural disgust.

While yet in Sikkim, traversing the moist bamboo jungles and tropical forests of the southern slopes of the Himalayas, leeches abounded and waylaid our footsteps. My people gathered these into water-bottles and brought them into

camp, where they placed the leeches on the backs of our transport animals, and as they fell off filled with blood, they were thrown into scalding water. Then they were sprinkled with salt and eaten with relish – savoury Tibetan blood-sausages!

In this austere country the Spartan laws of nature clear all life that is not equal to the situation from the ground; for only the vigorously strong and healthy can survive. Therefore the human material is excellent, provided it is left within the limitations of its natural sphere, both climatically and spiritually. If a Tibetan goes to India and enters the sphere of a European world, he soon droops and loses vitality. He is the natural result of unalterable conditions, and is quite unable to acclimatize himself to mental or physical conditions foreign to his own. Misguided missionary attempts, sprung from pure ignorance, soon bring their own punishment. Their failure is due to a theory which in practice would reverse the manifestations of natural laws. The conditions that now shake the very foundations of Asia, and result in terrible havoc and chaos, are the outcome of European interference, in complete disregard of the natural laws within a race that cannot be ignored without destroying the nature-bound image they reflect. European materialism at present seeks contact with nature only to harness it to its own uses or abuses, the individual ignoring the fact that he too is limited and bound by laws, in the fulfilment of which he lives as part of a vast plan of creation, but never as their originator or controlling power. He is now bent only on discovering the facts of a matter-of-fact world, and in his inventions and discoveries reflects the wonders of this world as in a mirror. Where he can grasp no tangible object he sees only empty space. He will explain a thunderstorm as the discharge of two opposite electric polarities, and is content with this dry statement. False explanations and mistaken ideas of

God lead to a dangerous freedom from spiritual restraint, to a materialistic mentality which will deny everything that is beyond or above its reach. Instead of a faith that is essential to an ethical social existence, destructive doubts spring up and block the way to any transcendental perception by which to rediscover lost origins. Doubt has bred folly and a sterile ungodliness; we have been busy undermining a mountain, instead of climbing to its lofty altitudes, set before humanity as a goal. We tamper with laws that may not be broken, and try to alter their course in blind Utopian hypotheses and incomprehensions, causing only conflict and disruption.

Asia has been turned into one of these breeding-grounds of conflict; we cannot educate it to our standpoint without outraging the natural laws of its races, without enervating its individual mental outlook, and the victim usually falls into the gulf which divides his evolution from ours. Robbed of any firm foothold, evil human tendencies are set free which hitherto had been controlled by a faith in religious precepts that is now put aside by Western education. Unconditioned faith and materialistic ambition cannot amalgamate, and when human power is pitted against natural forces, outraged nature flares into a revolt beyond all human check or control.

The mental structure and ability of the European of the present day evolved from his inner being, and on this his present social order is based and built up. It has not been foisted upon him, but is a mental heritage gradually developed by generation after generation; and future generations will carry this on a few steps further. A master does not fall from heaven ready made, but is the production of personal heritage. In recognition of this truth we should not commit the error of taking a creature whom nature has placed on another line of development, and suddenly place him on the present stage of our line of progress, which is

quite foreign to him. We push him on to the winding paths of a bewildering maze, where only those initiated can find their way; in this case those born amid its intricacies. And we thoughtlessly destroy a naturally-evolved – or call it God-willed – world, that was much happier in all its errors than we are able to make it by substituting a vacuum, for we can give it nothing else. The attempts of ethical scholastic theorists, to manipulate the natural character of a race, bear inevitable results that would be laughable if they were not tragic. This sacrilege becomes very apparent when we consider the ideal Tibetan standpoint as expressed in the teachings of his religion. What right have we to consider this religion and its surrounding superstition, which is a simple and primitive expression of reverence for higher laws, a retrograde step? Or to attempt to convert this race, peacefully vegetating in a world of their own, to the relative progress of ours? It is practically an impossibility. Whatever fanatical misguided idea prompts it, this endeavour is a very dangerous undertaking: it attempts no less than to lift a world completely off its own hinges.

Though atheistic Europe may today raise its adventurous head over the heights of Mount Everest, this will not diminish the mountain's elemental gigantic bulk, which is eternal. The Tibetans say that every bird which flies towards its summit goes blind: yet Englishmen, not to be beaten, work their way up its ice-bound heights with goggles and tubes of oxygen, struggling against every natural difficulty, urged and possessed by a delusion which at the altitude of 2000 metres rewards them with giddiness and mountain sickness. Yet not far below the summit of Mount Everest people dwell to whom such sickness is unknown; for their lungs and heart, and all the nerves in their bodies, are parts of that region, and its natural outcrop. Should England in a spirit of sport or adventure succeed in planting its own 'prayer-banner' on the highest peak of

Mount Everest, two things will result. For us Europeans it will mean another attainment of the materialistic spirit of research into mysterious forces of nature – a relative attainment of given facts. But for the Tibetan it would mean the destruction of the world his faith has built up, by placing man in a high light of personal attainment, endowing him with superhuman powers. This is the usual result of our civilization – on uncivilized races.

Why teach these people to handle and deal with things for which their nature has never prepared them! We fail the moment we try to replace the popular native hocus-pocus by the sober spirit of European calculation. We cannot give another race any progress and development which is independent of, and contrary to, its nature; and we only reap the fateful consequences of losing all its respect for us and our solid attainments. Such methods of education will have a disastrous result; they are foredoomed to be misinterpreted in the worst aspect!

Conditions in Tibet are still within naturally balanced margins, and what vitality is left in the ruling hierarchy is shown by its steady conservative opposition to alien and contrary influences.

Missionaries set forth to fight against dirt, while behind the curtain agents wait in readiness with perfumed soaps and washing materials. Sewing-machines follow and these require special cotton; and so on along the endless chain of modern requirements, each requiring another, pressing nature more and more into artificial channels. It is like an avalanche starting with a handful of snow, and our civilization is like such a fateful lump of snow when it tries, in the name of so-called European progress, to overstep all native and national characteristics. Matter and God opposed to each other: God consisting in the destruction of matter, and matter in the destruction of God. The two cannot exist

side by side! Detached from its cradle (soil and conditions) the Tibetan spirit becomes unintelligible and appears shallow and unpractical. It is a common error to look upon the originalities of a people's tenets as individualism rather than as a manifestation of nature, of which the aboriginal race is always the particular expression, and is, therefore, of course, to a great extent incomprehensible to every other race.

According to Tibetan teaching man becomes the man he is as a subconscious expression of creative impulse. Should he reach a perception of the ultimate spiritual fact of his earthly existence, he will strive for liberation, for he is no longer content to assert his life in the narrow limits between beginning and end. He is ready to cast this condition from him once he realizes the nullity and non-importance of matter. Man should not subjugate himself to earthly life by an endless wandering in bodily form from birth to death simply as a reflex affirmation of origin, or as a mere basis for the balancing point of evolution and dissolution. When a wheel turns round a centre, the point revolving on the periphery ever returns to the spot it started from, therefore life is symbolized as a wheel: the hub being the ego, and the outer rim of the disc life in human form, each point ever returning to its spot of departure. Life thus circling round the central ego is an actual recognized standstill, the point ever returning to the spot it started from. This is the Sangsara teaching of Tibet, the theory of endless wandering from birth to birth. For the average Tibetan, earthly existence is a curse, considering its austerities and difficulties. Spiritual emancipation, human perception unfolding into true understanding, by straining towards a higher aim, brings liberation. The aim is absolute non-existence in matter, and lies beyond all form and its inherent tendencies. This view of life has by no means sprung from the brain of a Gotama Buddha, he being only

the mouthpiece that expressed what was doubtless till then a sub-conscious current, originating through the peculiarity of the primeval mud of that region. Buddha is only a symbol of his teaching, not its originator. In the rudimentary Boën faith of Tibet which was pre-Buddhistic, earthly existence, chased continually by terrible demons and subjugated to their will, contains as kernel the tendency of complete denial of such existence within form and matter. So says the Sangsara teaching which, orally transmitted, gave the technique of dying, so as to avoid rebirth in form.

According to the Tibetan belief death is an unnatural end to life, introduced through the interference of evil demons, bent on prolonging the torture and terror of Sangsara. These evil spirits, full of sadistic purpose, seek to satisfy their terrible instincts in ever-varying complications of vice. They enmesh the soul in its own adhering sins, so that at the first opportunity they may fall upon their victim and deliver it into the evils of a new birth. They continually seek to hurl man from the stage of humanity he has so laboriously attained through a multitude of births, by reversing the order from bad to worse, the victim sinking ever deeper into the quagmire of sin and misery. This sudden interference upon life, by death, is therefore the work of elemental evil will, a principle of destruction which attacks everyone. He only who is joyfully prepared to meet this sudden attack, makes death a real conclusion to all embodied existence, a final liberation from this world of birth and death, and all its suffering. The first stage of consciousness in the world of form is at birth, the last stage the moment of death; the interval between this and a new consciousness in the world of form is *Bardo*, or the intermediate stage of terrible conditions through which the soul wanders after leaving its old covering of flesh, and while searching for a new one; it is full of fiery demons who dazzle the eyes of the soul with

terrifying mirrors, shake their frightful limbs at him, and turn into blazing suns. On pools of vice scarlet bubbles rise, and pestilential currents flow from the crushed brains of the victims. There are quagmires of entrails like heaving contortions of worms, from which spectral arms wave like the limbs of an octopus. There are swamps of blood with an oozing surface that gleams like a black mirror, piles of slippery eyeballs with bleeding entanglements of veins and streams of ruby-red tears. The unfortunate soul floats past such delirious images from compartment to compartment. Doors turn on their hinges, revealing ever-new scenes of horrors.

Woe to him who is dazzled and arrested by these; who does not hover past, always aware that he is only traversing a bad dream from which he must gradually rise to better conditions, or the horrors will grow deeper and darker. But if he proceeds, the stars will begin once more to glimmer over cloudy meadows, the green light of a slow dawn will grow to a single sparkling crystal, the thousand facets of which reflect the turning heavens filled with immeasurably blissful gods, floating on rosy-edged lotus flowers. Flashing flames of glory sweep over the sweet mild light of the canopy of ether. The soul has successfully conquered the illusive visions of its adhering thought-forms, and rises up to receive the reward of a rebirth of full value – and to its new testing. This intermediate stage yields him in review all the hallucinations evolved from the thoughts held during life by that particular soul. As in the strange and obscure ways of a dream, he re-experiences his weaknesses, his impulses, and passions, his strong points, and so on. But as he is a formless spectre himself, he will believe this world to be very real: the dreamer will experience his dreams as a reality.

The terrible visions of the *Bardo* stage will pursue and haunt him, growing in horrible intensity, the more he turns

his soul from the clear awareness that he is only dreaming, so that he may become reincarnated in that particular region as a most unhappy spirit. The raving demons have then enmeshed him, and hold him in the firm grip of their clutches, till his bodily nature is exhausted and the soul is once more able to lift itself by realization above this world of shadows.

Only by constant meditation while in full consciousness of form, that is during life, can a soul gain sufficient power to recognize the unreality of all these visions while on its journey. When severed from the body, such a soul retains and carries the consciousness and power acquired with it, and becomes a neutral spectator in a shadow world, passing through its terrors unharmed. It is like a dream experienced with open eyes, in which one does not lose the consciousness that one is dreaming.

He who prophesies his reincarnation in a certain place and person, oversteps this intermediate stage, because of course in his case the full consciousness would be carried over to the new-born body. This happened in the case of the Tali-Lama, and of Ranchan-Rinpoche, and of all 'masters'; they have long ago gained their liberation, and become incarnate in human form only that they may guide their fellow-creatures towards fuller knowledge. They are all-knowing; have risen above this world; possess super or cosmic consciousness, and can therefore fall into that abstract condition, impossible to ordinary humanity, where they perceive the procedure of worlds unknown to us, as well as the world that contains us. They perceive becoming and succumbing in their esoteric origin from the summit of their lofty thrones. Some of them even have definite knowledge of the dates and other details of the multitudinous incarnations in which their soul evolved in constant upward progression. Popular report says that such people's eyes are often watery and dim – a sign of their being able to

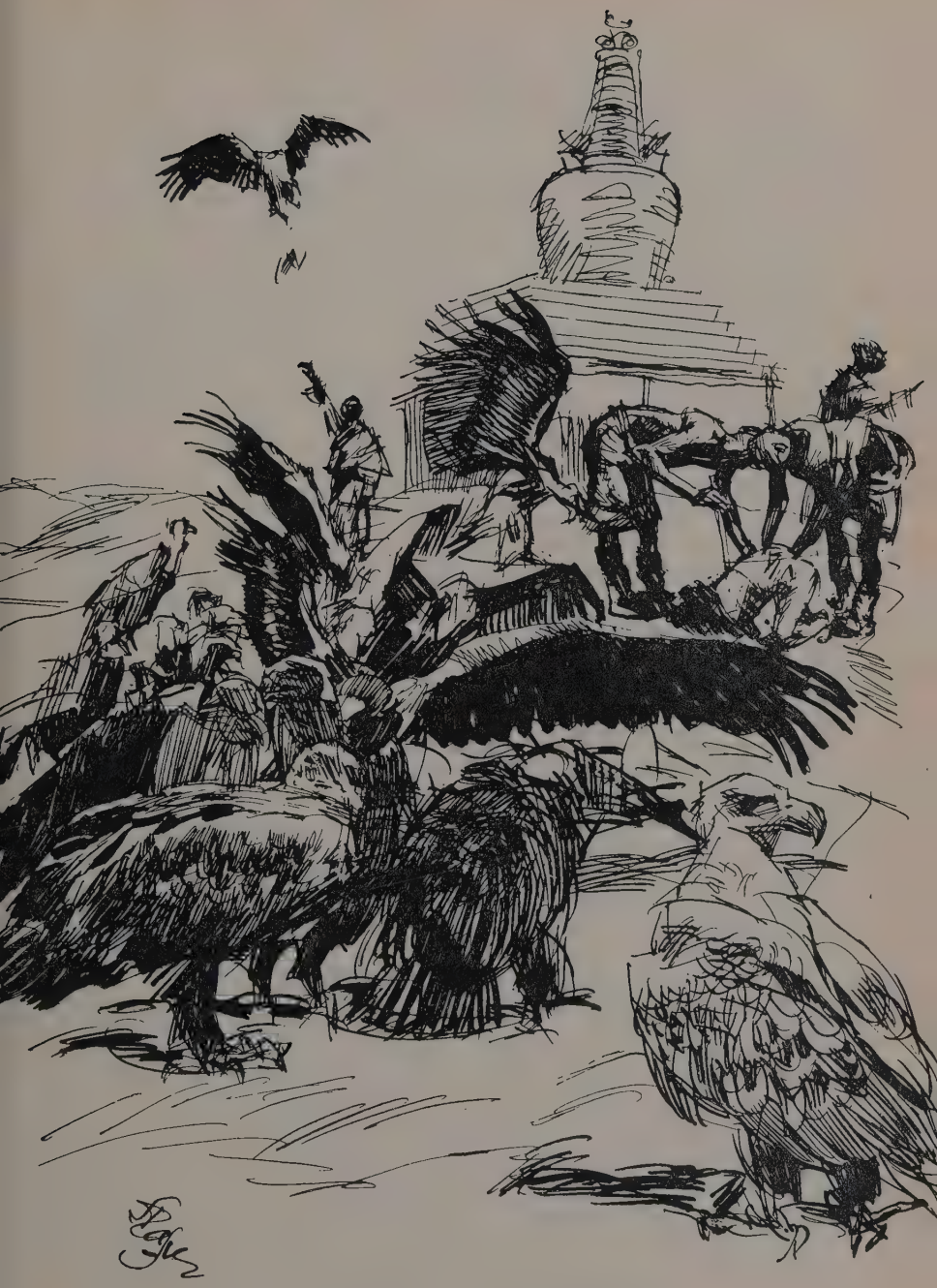
float in the pure light of spaceless void, in which all perception of form has vanished, and etheric perception is unveiled. This colourless light is the *No-thing* beyond the rays of the sun, beyond the silver beams of the moon, the sparkle of the stars, or the flaming tongues of fire. The third eye, the eye of inner vision, symbolized by a jewel between the brows of the image of Buddha, has extinguished the light of human sight. By such, and many other tokens that are of course merely symbols (only the higher and more intelligent lamas admit this) the God-idea of the average Tibetan works its way up. As his limited comprehension cannot rise to the heights of full understanding of such abstract thoughts, it becomes the soil of every kind of sombre and stultifying superstition.

I have had several opportunities of conversing with gurus and highly intelligent lamas, who all, without exception, recognized this evil, as a mere fact and side-product of their teaching, and dismissed the subject with the remark that to the incapable person the best teaching was of no use, and to the capable one it gave nothing new, as he possessed the advantage of perception, a faculty arising from within under the law of development. Very different is the case of those who have attained a deeper, fuller humanity. A lama once asked me if the European who 'recognized' the law of gravity and understood that the earth was round, was of a religious disposition, and whether this discovery, though it had the opposite effect on the majority, had not brought him nearer God? 'To us,' he continued, 'it matters not what form the earth may have, for the proof of this fact is a mere recognition of unalterable laws, in comparison with the contemplation of the creative impulse behind the visible universe – and therefore only relative. But the consequences of this sudden recognition of deeper values, unless led up to be inner natural alignment and linking up, are highly detrimental to faith, for they

check in the unprepared all ethical progress of religious concepts, eliminate the fear of God, and lead to social corruption. Surely technical attainments are a candle not worth the match?'

Such is the wisdom and view of a few lamas, and these encourage opposition to Western influences, though outwardly towards the people this view is veiled by encouragement of many popular superstitions. Priests go about from place to place carrying wooden cases sealed up, in which are objects entrusted to them by an evil deity – such as magic daggers – and they threaten to deposit these in the neighbourhood of people who fail in obedience. The evil one would at once appropriate his property and with it plague and persecute the community. In one case this demonic influence, as a consequence of disobedience, resulted in an outbreak of virulent smallpox. The dead had to be buried as a precaution during the epidemic, and this again brought several vampires into existence, which still molest that neighbourhood at night and make it almost unendurable. One can hear their piercing cries from the hills whenever a sickle moon sheds its weak light on the rocks and cairns of the high passes. No priest was able to banish these haunting terrors, and the people, terrified and depressed, hid themselves in their huts as soon as night approached. Their disobedience was dearly paid for!

It is a Tibetan habit to expose the dead on open ground, the corpses being usually dismembered and thrown to the vultures and scavenger dogs. Such a mound is surrounded by thousands of these great desert scavenger birds, that sit grouped around it in heraldic postures. Many are known individually to those who cut up the corpses, for when called by name one of the birds with a mighty sweep of wing will rise out of the group, and with a sudden downward swoop catch in its claws in mid air the piece of flesh



CUTTING UP THE CORPSE IN TIBET

thrown to it; it then flies off and settles a little further away to enjoy its meal in peace, the sweep of its widespread wings throwing up stones as large as a fist, as it alights. This is the usual way of disposing of the dead in Tibet, for it is maintained that as man is constituted of the four elements, fire, water, air, and earth, once death has taken place, the dissolution of his body into its component parts should proceed as rapidly as possible. In some cases after distributing the flesh, the bones are ground up, mixed with meal, and given to the birds, for thus the bodily remains are said to be dissolved into the airy element which the birds inhabit.

In wooded regions the corpses are burnt, and in the vicinity of rivers they are embedded in the water. Except in the case of death from contagious diseases, the Tibetans avoid earth burial, as they say the spirit of the departed is apt to re-inhabit the slowly decomposing body, and become a vampire, whereas a rapid disintegration by fire, or by distribution to animals, avoids this danger. Sometimes corpses are merely laid out in the open and a post driven into the earth beside them with paper prayer-banners attached. Then wolves come and gnaw at the corpse by night, and dogs, both wild and tame, by day. The former at one's approach go on with their meal undisturbed, and will attack the person who comes too near. It is deemed a bad sign for the soul of the departed if a corpse lies for some time untouched, but being devoured quickly is a sign of divine goodwill. A dead Tali-Lama or religious man of distinguished rank, whose life has been accompanied by wonderful happenings, is embalmed in the conventional pose of prayer. The corpse is put in a chest packed with salt to absorb the moisture, and for five months dried by steadily increased heat; then it is covered with a layer of cement, mixed with sandalwood, incense, and perfumes, as well as bits of paper scriptures and some earth. All this

is mixed in a mortar and smeared over the shrivelled skin of the shrunken body. The hands and face are gilded, and the lips and eyes painted most realistically. Then, draped in the sumptuous silken robes of their rank, their heads crowned with high helmet-shaped silk hats, and their fingers twisted in the graceful *mudra* poses of prayer, these mummies sit in silent lifeless rows. Above them hang the silk-framed picture banners, representing red, white, or green deities. And from the cool brown depths beyond, awe-inspiring demon mysteries, with their thousand arms, sparkle in the quivering light of butter lamps which strikes high-lights on the protruding cheek-bones of all these lifeless faces posed in frigid silence.

I once saw one of these sitting mummies in a convent, shrunken almost to the dimensions of a doll. In fact, I thought at first it was a clay figure, until, fascinated by the delicate and fine modelling of the golden hands, I realized that such living expression was more than even the greatest artist could achieve. These fingers were posed in the *mudra* of voidness, that quick gesture with which the lamas conclude the service. From the folds of pale silken scarfs (such as it is the custom to present to one's host on paying a visit) these hands rose in lines of inexpressible mysticism.

The face was covered with a veil, and I asked if it might be raised, but the abbess, raising a thick woolly wig from her shaven head, and putting a very pink steaming tongue out of her face (smeared a pitch black), begged to be excused from this. I was told that it was the mummy of a nun who had been incarcerated for thirty-two years in a narrow cell, wishing to be completely isolated from the world, and to give herself up to perpetual meditation. During this long period her body shrank to these tiny dimensions. They told me that in another case of extreme asceticism, it was found, on finally opening the cell, that the food, pushed

A MONGOL MINISTRANT (CIVILIAN)

in through a hole the size of a head, had not been touched for some days, and that the cell was empty!

I was then shown the cell this little nun had been walled up in. It was about two and a half yards square, and not high enough for me to stand upright in. It had originally been twice as high, I was told, but accumulations of ordure had filled it up. Dreadful thought! To rest on one's own filth is by no means considered unclean or unholy in the opinion of this weird country. The only persons whom they do shun and consider unclean are those who dismember the corpses.

As a rule women are not allowed to enter monasteries, but only the temples and temple yards that are unconnected with the dwellings of the lamas. The devotional procedure for both men and women is as follows: arrived before the image or symbol of deity, the folded hands are held before the breast, lifted to the forehead, and above the head; then the devotee sinks to his knees, and touches the ground three times with his forehead. In the temple yard various prayer-wheels stand under little wooden roofs, and these must all be put in motion from left to right while passing by, for this is a mode of prayer. Except the '*Om mani padme hum*' there is no other worded prayer for the use of the laity of Tibet. Outside the temple walls there are usually more prayer-wheels in rows, and as one passes, one runs one's fingers along these, as a child would along an open railing. Those who visit the temple bring gifts.

Should a priest break his vow of celibacy, he is ejected from his monastery and loses his rights in the community of lamas. He lives henceforth with his wife and family amongst the nomadic settlements, is consulted in every trouble, and becomes their medicine-man and exorciser of evil spirits. I came across several of these free monks in Tibet and Mongolia. They smoked and drank liquor, but still wore the red robe of their former rank – that wonderful

red symbolizing original life clothed in flames; the loose flowing scarf wound round their shoulders being the fluttering tongues of fire. These married priests perform the prayers and ceremonies of the village, and are present at the temple festivities in their full robes of state, carrying their children and accompanied by their wives. Though cast out from the inner priesthood they stand with the people and watch the feast with devout and reverent eyes. Tibet is a strange world without and within! The strangeness of the scenery, beyond all conceivable proportions, is reflected in its people and their habits.

WANDERING

One travels by narrow paths that cling to towering walls of sheer precipice which rise without a break to the peaks that pierce the heavens. To the north lies the cold Tchantang, with lakes like open eyes of blue-grey on the white flats of soda deposit, with rust-yellow swamps that look like tracks of aimless road shining through a covering of snow. Over this country unrestrained winds wail in unbroken monotony, the only other sound ever heard being the cry of wild geese in flight overhead. It is a wide desolation over which the gaze wanders ahead and the steps ever tarry behind, as the goal for ever recedes. At times a straight line of flighting birds travels high above, and is blown asunder into dismembered links by the strong gusts of wind; or one sees cranes resting huddled into their silvery plumage like mysterious growths on slender stems. The lakes one comes to are without fish. Their rippled surface is a dull leaden mirror spreading without end from the shore where plovers work idly overhead, and drop downwards in steps, where snipe call and turn into spinning balls, and only scanty blades of wiry grass shake in the desert wind.

We pass through such scenery for days to the monotonous rhythm of our steps. If a shot is fired, it sounds like the click of a tongue, and dies without echo. No power, it seems, could ever awaken this nature from its dream of desolation. But on these broad plains the nights almost bring back to the dazed traveller a measure of confidence; they consume the edges of the unlimited distance and narrow

in, till one's attention mounts upwards into the open perspective of space, in which constellations of scintillating stars move in wide circles, as though guided by an invisible hand across this vastness, and one realizes that one represents but the shadowy flight of a moment, little knowing whence or whither. In this vast country we can never fix our eyes upon a goal that we can hope to reach today, tomorrow, or the day after; for each goal moves and recedes before us, and always keeps its deceptive distance. Such are the plains of Tibet, and such are the souls of the men who move over them; taking their time from the stars or the course of the sun; unheedful of distance as they wander towards their shadowy goal, turning their prayer-wheels and letting their prayer-banners flutter in the icy wind.

And yet this dreaming nature has hidden moments of surprise: mossy carpets that are almost green; black dots moving slowly, with smaller ones between – yaks and sheep; and far away in the distance the black roofs of a few tent-dwellers – a shepherd camp. The people we come upon invariably seem to expect us, a curious fact in these almost uninhabited regions of Tibet. No man ever passes another without telling him of his experiences, for such a meeting is always a happy event for a Tibetan. After weeks of solitude the possibility of contact with another human being becomes the subject of his meditation, – talk and Tibetan beer (hot water poured on to fermented millet, and when cool sipped through a thin hollow bamboo). These delights draw the lonely desert-dweller with irresistible attraction, and in search of them he may travel for weeks on end. These are the rare wayside entertainments in an apathetic march of desolate and comfortless weeks. Though nature unfolds her ever-changing moods, one's interest flags; so much energy is used up outwardly, and one's inner receptive response is dulled by the continual

sameness. Endless plains with heights and valleys, bare of any trees or bushes, a featureless distance with its constant deception in a crystal-clear atmosphere, grow wearisome, and by way of relief the traveller seeks solace in introspection. One's brain rotates like a prayer-wheel spinning thought-free round its axis. Very possibly these immense featureless expanses account for the faculty of complete absorption and meditation inherent in the races dwelling upon them.

The idea of measuring distance is unknown to the Tibetan. He just wanders endlessly and agelessly through the even balance of day and night. Atmospheric appearances, the length of the shadows, the position of a constellation of stars, are the unfailing accompaniment of one's journey. According to these the leader of a caravan directs the work and rest of his animals, turning their steps towards watering pools or camping places. Through moving wind and light the landscape unrolls like an endless painting, constantly overtaking its perspective and discarding its vanishing point. There are nameless passes that from the distance look utterly impassable, towering masses that lift sheer walls of precipice out of fields of ice and snow, like jagged teeth of black rock jutting through a frothy waterfall. Marvellous is the course of the clouds amongst these high peaks, unfurling great white folds of cloth from above, while below, on the wind-raked desert of stone, the sunlight trembles and creeps up the mounting inclines. Greeny-brown patches of moss lie in the valleys. The stone wind-screens of deserted Dogpa camps stand out like a gaping ruin of some dilapidated house. Snow pigeons flutter up and sink down again between the stones like bits of paper blown before the wind. Overhead an invisible mountain sheep sends a loose stone crashing down like an avalanche, or, with a sudden whirr of wings, a few wild-fowl fly up, and are swallowed by the open perspective. Over the high summits the sky stretches its airy billows from peak to

peak without tangible limit. Round the head of one of these snow-capped giants huge clouds approach and meet in a struggling mass, throwing a soft blue shadow over its eternal countenance and far down, to where the sunlight strikes on a red ridge that cuts the view and seems almost near enough to touch. An eagle circles in wide curves and spirals, his heraldic plumage catching the light from below.

A great wall of shadow pushes its overhanging line towards our ever-narrowing path. On one side a sheer precipice drops in wide curves into abysmal depths below, from where the thundering roar of rushing water rises like a muffled sound heard through padded walls. Steep inclines, of loose rubble, slope from the massive boulders down into giddy depths of bottomless haze. Of a sudden the ground below me moves, and from under my feet an eagle plunges into the ocean of air and stretches his wings full sail, with the pointed tips of his feathers bent up like agile fingers. In majestic curves and spirals he mounts, his shadow moving over the depths and sliding foreshortened up the steep inclines. High above the precipice he still bends his curved flight, drawing his flitting blue shadow across the valley, and his ellipses grow smaller as he ascends.

The wretched mule I ride is not to be persuaded by rein or pressure to keep to the inner side of the path. It goes trippingly along the outer edge, and sends loose stones flying down into the empty void below. If I look down I see my thighs and knees outlined against space and a wave of giddiness surges to my brain. So I have to keep my eyes glued to the inner wall of the precipice. One false step on loose ground and we should be hurled through the air into the depths of eternity. As soon as I shut my eyes my body loses all sense of weight, and I become a feather floating up a spiral stair into open space. I fight against this threat of mountain sickness, and try not to transmit my own uncertainty to the animal under me. In such moments one

is bent on forestalling a sudden accident. I am prepared at any moment to throw myself off inwards, away from the precipice. Yet before this could be done one would already be in mid air, since any self-protective movement would have to come a hair's breadth *before* the false step, and it is impossible to anticipate this. A little further on, the path narrows to a seemingly impossible degree. My Tibetans stretch forward their necks and put their hands to their ears, listening for mule bells that might be coming toward us. Then they shout their loudest, but it is doubtful whether any sound would be heard at a distance, for even the thunder of falling water is only an uninterrupted murmur in this titanic world of absolute silence – or is it an enormous centre of reverberation without limit, which no tone can bridge? The latter seems most probable, and if we had superhuman hearing these heights might be emitting a roaring thunder, for there is a peculiar pressure on the drums of one's ears – a deafness of uninterrupted roaring.

One dare not face the idea of any encounter along this thread of a track. My Tibetans look anxious. They howl and shout with mouths wide open. They tell me how two mounted men once met on this path. To turn the animals was impossible, so they cast lots as to which beast was to be thrown over the edge to let the other pass. As the animal destined to give way felt itself being pushed over backwards, it caught its master's arm in its teeth and tore him down too. The other beast shied at this and threw its rider, who fell over the edge, having a tight hold of the reins and pulling his mount over with him. So both men and both beasts fell and were crushed to pulp on the stones far below. The horror of the recorded tragedy made me shudder the more, while we slowly proceeded along this unfortunate path. On the left, yawning space; on the right, a smooth perpendicular wall of rock, rising sheer and overhanging the track into nothingness. From below, our

caravan must have seemed like a string of ants clinging to the wall, if it could be seen at all. The sound of our mule bells was deadened and could travel no distance. The mules went single file each in the track of the other, like tight-rope walkers, along the extreme edge of the path. Far below in the valley, boulders and rocks looked like sand. All swirled around me, while the precipice above took to overhanging more and more, and while any skyline beyond receded as if drawn by elastic bands as soon as one looked at it. Yet if I looked into space I felt I must plunge into the air. We passed round a bend and the thunder below grew louder for a moment, to be lost again the next, in that queer sound-blindness as if one had plugged a finger into each ear.

After about an hour's progress the gorge bends to one side, and a sheet of slab rock slants steeply down into the soil below. The wall of precipice above recedes, and the path pushes into a declivity between these two. As soon as my feet were on firm ground again, I felt like awaking from a nightmare that had taxed all my strength. The worst storm at sea, pitching and tossing on mountainous waves, is nothing compared to this feeling of being suspended from a high wall in mid air – a mere handful of earth-dust suddenly made aware of its puny insignificance. The laws of gravity refuse to work, one's dazed mind dances into space, and the body is ready to plunge into this ocean of air. An eagle shooting up into the blue becomes a matter of course to one's hypnotized senses.

Further on, the path mounts over swelling ground until on the summit another unforgettable panorama meets one's gaze – a wide cauldron-shaped valley lying high up amidst tall mountain peaks against which a dark bank of clouds unfolds into fantastic shapes that form and re-form on the pale green sky of evening. Powerful giants seem to grip each other in silent struggle with swelling nebulous

muscles, new bulks curving out of them like white smoke from a soundless explosion. The screened light as of a fire seems to touch their sharp black edges with glowing blood. These silent giants writhe, with their many muscles turning and bending in a terrifying fashion, and under their huge dimensions the landscape dwindles in size. Their shadows fall across to where we stand, till they sink gradually over the hills and roll along the skyline towards us at great speed, only to lift and double back, like veils in the wind.

Something catches my eye amongst the boulders; a white form that leaps from rock to rock, bounding towards us like a skimming fish, with piercing cries. Apparently a loose-jointed skeleton has come to life, and is waving its limbs about. My people shout and whistle, and even the mules get restless. This amazing apparition draws near and becomes a man stark naked, smeared all over with chalk. He stands before my people and glares at them out of two black eyeholes cut into a sort of hood stretched over his face and the ridge of his nose. The edge of his hood is all clotted and has dripped in repulsive lumps on to his shoulders and stomach – some greenish-yellow filth mixed with blood and chalk. Round his loins hangs a horrible wreath of sausages, or entrails, that look as if they came out of his body. His thin legs stand widespread like reeds in the large openings of his Tibetan boots. In one hand he dangles a bunch of entrails with a bit of coral red lung and a black heart capped with fat, freshly drawn from some quivering animal, for the blood was congealing like a cuff round his wrist. I now saw that the hood over his face was a sheep's stomach cut open and emitting a terrible stench. No fantasy or mad freak of imagination could equal the masked gruesomeness of this apparition, standing broad-legged on the grey soil, and gurgling or growling at us like a beast of prey craving for our heart's blood.

With sundown the cold rises like an icy breath from the

blue valleys. By now the gigantic cloud forms have settled down and a clear frosty sky stretches above the mountain tops. One almost feels the thread of the thermometer sliding down and down. Yet here stands this human nightmare naked, threatening to throw his disgusting handful over our heads. A bargaining as weird as his appearance now starts, of which I do not lose a word, as I gradually arrive at an explanation of this ghastly creature. He is a so-called sin-eater, expelled from some settlement, on his lonely way to a high pass or desert, and we happened to cross his path. He now threatens to throw the whole burden of his terrible sins and filth on to our caravan, unless we pay a ransom. My people start bargaining as though the devil possessed them, and, moreover, are eager to add their own sins to his. He puts out his hand for gifts but withdraws it several times, and the entrails of the scapegoat threaten to be hurled at us. My people increase their offer each time by a few coppers. Half an hour is thus wasted while the caravan stands waiting, and the colours of the sky damp down, with a glitter of stars here and there. So I bring out the silver disc of a rupee, which the creature quickly slips into his boot. My people burst into shouts of joy and whistling, as they throw sand after his retreating form, and prance about the gloom in comic leaps. We have got rid of all our sins, just like stripping off old rags, without remorse, or good resolutions. But to me the man who has taken them is of mysterious interest – that naked chalk-white creature wandering towards a pass or desert to expose his offering of lung and entrails. How many days and nights has he been on his lonely journey, and how many more days of burning sun and nights of cutting frost will pass before he returns to his village, if ever he returns? He vanishes, quickly swallowed by the night, which now spreads its millions of glittering stars in an awe-inspiring silence that strikes the ear. My thoughts follow

A TIBETAN SOLDIER

that whitewashed spectre staggering on its bleak way, its naked body devoured by ice and sunburn, and its tongue parched with thirst. I see him running up steep inclines of loose shale, urged by his mad desire to throw off the weight of uncleanness with which he is loaded. A wrathful god bestrides him till this is accomplished, so fear whips him ever onwards and makes of him a willing sufferer of superhuman pains. We reach a pass after three days' march without again encountering this horror, or seeing his gruesome burden. I was on the look out for it at each *latza*. Possibly an eagle had carried it off to some high aerie.

We then drop over lesser ridges to flat country. The mountains level down to rounded hills, and recede to the horizon, for we have crossed the high plateau and are now on the verge of desert and steppe. Here we meet the first camels. Their loads are being transferred to mules and yaks for further transport up the steeper country to southern Tibet, while the camels await new loads, that are descending ding-donging in long chains from the mountains. The road to Mongolia lies somewhere in this neighbourhood.

There are lakes down here like bits of sky let into the ground level with the flat soil. A group of tents with their backs to the wind look like the parallel roofs of a buried city, and about them a mixed gathering of Tibetans, Mongols, and Chinese move about; lamas from Urga on their way to Lhasa, Tibetans on their way to Mongolia, and Chinese merchants. Over the horizon little groups of mounted robbers crop up suddenly, with a streamer of dust behind them, and vanish again somewhere on the wide expanse with their booty. They carry old-fashioned rifles with forked gun rests slung across their shaggy fur coats, and sticking up high behind them, straight swords, a yard long, stuck through their tight-wound belts and

pushed out horizontally by all the belongings and provisions within their coats. On sturdy little ponies they scurry across the undulating ground, that reveals them as moving dots one moment and conceals them the next. These riders are wild fellows with massive square faces the colour of dried orange peel, high cheek-bones, and little slits of eyes screwed up by the sun's glare, under their overhanging crop of matted hair. In their left ears they wear large brass rings set with a milky green turquoise the size of a fingernail. They sit their high wooden saddles with their knees drawn up, and their toes in heavy stirrups turned in against the pony's heaving rump. A thieving lot they usually are, cowards in open fight, but cruel and merciless in robbing the helpless. They will request hospitality for the night, and under cover of darkness make off with all they can remove – a terror to the helpless Tibetan villager.

All day a strong wind had combed the ochre-yellow plain, throwing its sand against one's teeth in gusty handfuls, and draping the horizon in copper-coloured clouds of dust. Towards evening it died away, shaking with exhausted breath the wiry blades of desert grass. The sun glides down to the western edge of the world and settles into the deeper colours of repose. The Tibetans had spent most of the day, naked to the waist, wandering about in search of dried yak dung, the only fuel procurable in this bare country; now they put on their fur coats, slip out of their tents one after another, and scatter in various directions to round up their animals. With peculiar cries they swing their slings, leaning forward to the throw. The grazing camels lift their curving necks and trot towards camp, throwing their legs about like dangling attachments, and wagging their sagging humps. Their shadows lengthen on the wide plain, now flushed with the rosy glow of sunset. Camels trot in pairs before their drivers who in quick

strides overtake them, grasp their nose-ropes and lead them back to where the loads lie about. Grumbling and snorting, each camel protests as it bends its neck to the painful tugs at its nose-rope. But the driver clicks his tongue and pulls remorselessly, like an impatient visitor at a bell-rope, till at last with a sudden jerk the camel falls on its knees, with bent hind legs pushes its springy sole-pads into position, and in three breaks comes to rest, holding its head in horizontal superciliousness and resignation, on the graceful curve of its neck, and gazing with soft dark eyes through its long lashes in sleepy disdain. Slowly, with gurgling sounds, it begins to swallow and strain up the store in its stomach. Then its jaws tremble and move from side to side as it leisurely chews the cud, with a sound like grinding millstones; green slime oozes at the corner of its mouth – a study of peaceful contemplation.

Meanwhile the sagging hump is straightened up and felt wrapped round in three or four layers. On this two parallel bars are laid along the spine, attached to each other in front. A rope at the end of one bar is passed round the other, and pulled tight to keep the wrapping in its place, and the saddling is complete. A camel will suffer all things except careless loading, and will protest loudly, throwing flakes of froth over its shoulder at its driver, until the balance lies level. When the loading is over, the iron spokes of the tent are pulled out of the ground, the roof folded, and the black yak haircloth wrapped round the poles. Then with hind legs seeking firm grip the leading camel raises its quarters, jerks to its knees, and then to its feet. The nose-strings are tied to the saddle poles of the camel in front, as loosely as possible, to prevent the tearing of nostrils during the march. Then the riding camels are mounted standing, by catching hold of the mane, pulling the neck down, putting one's knee on it and being lifted by the upward jerk to the saddle like a feather. The leading rider

catches hold of the first camel's nose-rope, and the caravan starts off single file in a long chain.

The sun has suddenly dipped below the horizon, and a blue shadow glides over the undulating ground of the plain like a delicate veil. It gradually climbs up the rosy slopes of the opposite distance, wiping out the last glints of sunlight. Tones of slate and violet then creep over the horizon, under a deepening sky of bluish pink, till all fades into the green tints of evening. The distance grows deeper and suddenly subsides into dull neutral tones. Overhead, the silken dome deepens its blue, until the first timid stars appear. Now the collars of sheepskin coats are wrapped tightly over chests, and the flaps of fur caps pulled down, for the breath of night strikes colder as the gloom deepens. Wild ducks and geese stream overhead in long flights to their night quarters, their cries piercing the silence. Then at the head of our shadowy moving caravan a voice lifts timidly; a second joins in from the rear of the swaying line, strong and harsh like the frosty night. A third voice murmurs, and all three meet and join to the even rhythm of moving camels swaying the bodies of their riders to and fro. The men have sunk their heads low as they crouch between the humps with high-drawn knees. Then each voice drops back into silence, and one of the men sinks forward, lays his head on the hump before him, and, clutching the chain, goes to sleep.

We are carried on and on, soundlessly, on the broad padded feet of these ships of the desert. Swinging step by step, the endless sand rolls past from horizon to horizon, flanked by darkness. Night is spread abroad in silent majesty, the sky ablaze with myriads of stars, each spark a little ball of floating brightness quite near, yet always so far above me. Presently I, too, feel as though I were floating amid the unending perspective of this starry procession, intensifying in airy depth towards its zenith. The constella-

tions gleam amongst their lesser neighbours like pearls of light broadcast over space. They wheel up like lamps over the horizon, pass overhead and sink again. The cold penetrates one's lungs. A camel's jaw crunches as it chews, a load creaks; and to the even rhythm of these padding steps the cosmos wheels its unending splendour overhead, turned by the invisible hand of time.

Suddenly a jerk startles all the gliding shadows, and camels snort as they bunch together with colliding loads, and break into a confused trot. One of the sleeping men is shot out of his seat in a wide curve, his whip and cap rolling to the ground. Startled out of his dreams he stoops to collect these, and runs behind his camel till he catches its nose-rope and slows its pace. With lifted heads the camels scent something in the cold clear air, but quiet is gradually restored, and the caravan once more takes up its silent swinging course through the intensely cold air. The Tibetans have sunk into their coats like balls of fur. But in the east a steely grey shows; then the stars pale and recede in the mounting veils of dawning light. The distances expand and take form as the eastern light hardens and absorbs the darkness and the stars, leaving one lingering point of light for the first bunch of sunbeams to sweep away. The bronze faces of the men are blurred and tarnished after the cold night. Then the sun appears, strikes warmly on us, and sends our shadows out in front of the caravan.

I can scarcely tell yesterday from today on this wide world of sand stretching from horizon to horizon, with a faint blue skyline far distant. In a month we may be there, and before us the same and yet another world of sand may extend. As the blue increases overhead a wind stirs gently, and soon gains in strength. With an abrupt snort of decision the leading camel halts. The rider slides down to earth; the caravan stops and the camels kneel one after the other. The antelope's horn is drawn out of each slip knot,

and the loads fall to either side. In a moment the tent goes up on its tripod; an iron basin is filled from the water-skins, and dry dung piled for a fire before the tent. Then a biting smoke curls up and is blown about by the wind; little flames dance up and down, while dried meat is put on to boil, which presently tastes like tough boot leather, and before long the men are chewing within, while the camels chew without.

They talk of towns and settlements and of the people who live in happy companionship. They long for Lhasa or Shigatze. Had a settlement been near, some of my men would have slunk off to it and its girls and Tibetan beer. They all long for the hour that brings them to a village. A halt in some larger place always spells delay. As soon as one wants to start, an animal goes sick by the will of God, or a man gets undetermined pains, firmly refusing a remedy, another is away in search for his grandmother, or more probably amongst the beauties who will be responsible for the next generation.

PART II

HUMAN MONSTERS

The caravan had disbanded a year ago, travel-weary and battered. Other camels went to and fro in long chains, swaying to their noiseless footsteps over the endless undulations of the steppes. The woolly tangles of their old coats in turn gave way in ragged flakes to the pale undergrowth of a new fur that rounded all their angles. Some of these camels now lay at rest, before the low walls of the house which is the weary goal of every traveller who finds his way into Mongolia. Whatever direction he may come from, he always lands before this house, with its crooked flight of broken steps leading to an upper room, with a familiar door which refuses to close. In front of the house an evil-smelling stream runs in a dreary curve, with two or three tree trunks laid across as a bridge. A persistent wind whistles round the angles of the house, blowing refuse and paper before its strong breath towards the meat shops beyond. Round these a pack of mangy dogs is always quarrelling, while in mid air crows jostle and peck at each other.

The town was shrouded in the bedraggled snow of a late winter. Under its frozen and grimy mantle little mounds showed everywhere. These were the half-covered carcasses of dead dogs, their clenched teeth gleaming in startling whiteness, for no mud can adhere to such smoothness.

The saffron tints of twilight streaked the sky between shreds of cloud, and a faint anticipation of hope set one

wondering whether after all the havoc of winter, this shabby wind-swept desolation could ever be transformed by the magic touch of spring – the while one's gaze travelled beyond the begrimed town, towards the yellow-brown curves of hills on which a few patches of clean snow still gleamed.

Life was awakening and struggling towards renewal, under the slanting rays of sunshine that melted the edges of the snow into a thick slush, that formed large puddles on the stony paths winding between dilapidated Russian houses, in palisaded enclosures. In their windows clothes hung drying by day, and at night the red light of an oil lamp glowed through drawn blinds.

Now that Urga had become the centre of a Russian province, it presented a poverty-stricken and incongruous scene – a medley of Russian houses interspersed with round-domed Mongolian jurts. From one of the latter a blue-black stove-pipe thrust its crooked ugliness out of the arched roof. It belonged to some of the nomadic people who had drawn within the sheltering Russian palisade and shared the life and ways of their neighbours. The houses of this new Russian province, with damp and dirt soaking into their foundations, lacked any sign of taste and refinement. They were filled with the rubbish of cheap mass-production which the Russian flood had brought to Urga, and which the bewildered Mongols now bought and used, discarding their own admirable hand-made articles. They had adopted Russian boots with great pride, and cocked military caps, embellished with the star of the Soviet, on their heads. Overnight the shoddy tastelessness of Russian provincialism had destroyed the old culture of Mongolia that had evolved gradually for a thousand years and more. So ignorant was the East of the value of its own cultural possessions, that it reached out blindly for worthless objects and ideas, utterly useless in these surroundings. Here a world had

evolved from within, subconsciously serving its own purpose, without realizing its own value, guided by self-fulfilling laws. And now its people blindly accepted every innovation as of equal value or better, however unsuitable to their needs or character in form or material. The novelty alone of things that came from a sphere that to the Mongol was a blank sufficed to dazzle him; as yet no criticism was possible, for the imported novelty upset all judgment. Thus Asiatic ignorance amidst its own art and culture was victimized because of the uncritical attitude with which it accepted, and was eager to adopt, a new world and its shallow growth of strange customs.

In this breeding-ground of bacteria, Russian methods of hygiene were waging war against the richly coloured pomp of Mongolian costume, so characteristic of the race, as though this were the only cause of all the vermin and disease germs that continually sapped the vitality of the people. Young Mongolia fell before the attack of its northern neighbours. Its childish hand reached out for a strange toy, without realizing that it concealed a dagger that would soon stab its too credulous heart.

Old Mongolia had lost the love of its children, who now threw themselves into the arms of Russia, dreaming of a future of pleasure and enjoyment, to be acquired by shouting the 'International,' by blindly disowning the home of their birth, and by building up a state which would be the spiritual child of Russia's present phase. Mongolia was the victim of a confidence trick. Empty promises of a paradise on earth were enough to unseat feudalism and hierarchical rule and to overthrow their own natural and happy communism, while as yet the people knew nothing of the 'blessings' of a civilization which was supplanting the views and ways that were the outcome of their character and environment.

In 1917 Russia was overtaken by destiny. Her powerful

old regime had grown weak and impotent, and the rustic bear turned upon his masters, tired of dancing to their music. The moment had come to burst the chains of bondage. Prisoners of war were freed in thousands after terrible years of confinement behind barbed wire entanglements under unspeakable conditions. Revolution had brought the longed-for release from hell, but it destroyed any last remnant of humanity. Reason was dead. Their lips were aflame with songs of freedom, with impassioned speeches and hymns of hate against all human order, against the wheels that had ground them under. Their deeds should be a repetition of the cruelties that had broken them. Such unfortunate creatures went forth in every direction, in the hope of finding a home and comfort, and receded every hour from any chance of doing so. In search of freedom they crossed the frontiers of Mongolia from the south-west and east, if they had the luck to get so far, for the desert grass and icefields of Asia have shortened the journey of many of these unfortunates. But wherever they did appear, they brought ills and infections that only needed a receptive soil in which to spread their blight.

Somewhere in the north-east this spirit of revenge concentrated in the person of Baron Ungern-Sternberg. His wife and child had been massacred, and all his property destroyed by his vassals in the fury of their sudden freedom. Now his one aim in life was revenge against those who had robbed him of all that made life worth living. His person, once well kept, was now neglected; a rough beard sprouted in uneven patches like desert grass under a moustache with waving ends, at which his nervous fingers pulled continually. He had the eyes of a vulture, with trembling pupils. Behind his broad cranium the calculating cruelty of madness smouldered. Urga was full of freed war prisoners infected with the leprosy of communism, and this was the nearest place where his aristocratic hands could begin to

AN OLD MONGOL (STUDY)

break their necks. The passion of revenge lifted him over impossible obstacles; it lent him superhuman power, and seemed for a while to make him bullet-proof.

Mongolia was at this time still under Chinese administration. A large garrison was stationed at Urga, and smaller ones at Ulliasutai and Kobdo, separated from each other by thousands of miles of desert and steppe. It was from these regions that seven centuries ago the stormy wind of necessity had whipped up the Golden Horde of Ghenghis Khan, which, possessed by the demons of hunger and necessity, overran the boundaries of their desolate country. In their wake they left blood, murder, and destruction, driving ever onwards like a swarm of ravenous locusts that fall on field after field, and strip everything bare. Torn from their soil they knew only one law – the destruction of life – which sent them like fiery arrows into the fruitful fields of the south and west. A horde driven by fear, flying from the barrenness of their own country, levelling every obstacle and overcoming each obstruction, in a wild rush of hurrying ponies, like a flooded river bursting its dam. By the great wall that China had erected as a bar to the rising flood from the north-east, the besieging tide was broken, and gradually subsided. And the Chinese, after being besieged and pressed, regained the guiding reins. Mongolia, since the fall of the Golden Horde, had been under the authority of China in matters of politics and protective measures. Therefore, in his lust for revenge on the Red element of Russia, Baron Ungern-Sternberg had only Chinese interference to reckon with. But he had no hesitation about breaking every law, and overthrowing any authority that stood in his way; and with the sudden fury of an animal gone mad he rose, and, with a strong blow from the hammer of his revengeful purpose, broke the power of China in Mongolia. He set out with a band of thirty-five men, unarmed and ill-equipped. Their feet were wrapped in

raw hides, tied on with wire and string, and their bodies in torn coats of Mongolian or Chinese origin. This inconspicuous little band found its way to the gates of Urga, and lay in wait there to wreak its terrible vengeance. One night, long after the din of copper temple bugles, drums, and conches, and the rising and falling chant of praying lamas had ceased, and all the place lay silent, led by the Baron, who himself was armed only with a riding-whip, they pounced on the Chinese guard at the eastern gate of Mainatchen, overwhelmed the garrison, took possession of their arms, and sent their opponents flying in every direction. All was done in a few hours of sudden whirlwind confusion. The next morning batches of Chinese soldiers came forth to attack the Baron, but their superiority of two hundred to one was quickly broken, and they turned and fled, throwing their arms away, pursued by the blind fury of a demon who broke their necks with a single twist of his wrist, bent on obliterating Chinese authority. A wonder seemed to have taken place overnight. The Mongols stared with open-mouthed amazement at this tragedy taking place in their midst, ignorant of its meaning.

The various Russians living in Urga rose from their warm beds in scanty clothing and fled as they were into the icy night air of the steppes, urged by a dark premonition of the terrible fate that was about to overtake them; for raving madness impelled the Baron and his horde in their merciless vengeance. Women and children staggered to their end, mutilated beyond recognition; blood shrieked to heaven! The Tshal-Lama followed the Baron's example, for the barbaric spark of atavism smouldering within him caught fire and enflamed his being in true Mongolian style. He, too, hurled himself on the Chinese and sacrificed their hearts' blood in hundreds, before the altars of his demons of cruelty. He pressed his standards to the slit throats of his victims,

A MONGOLIAN ARCHER

saturating them in the spurting life-blood. These red prayer-banners fluttered in the wind before his jurts, and the dogs of the steppes had ceased to quarrel, for their larder was overfilled. His saddlery was made of human skin flayed from his living prisoners. The ruthless ancient gods of his country, long suppressed by benign Buddhistic influence, now cried for revenge and demanded compensation, in taking complete possession of this broad-faced monster, with pock-marked skull and firm, well-knit body. They roused the spark long buried under the ashes of artificially acquired inhibitions, inspired by the absolutist temple hierarchy. Now this spark flamed up with unchecked fury, destroying all it touched.

Baron Ungern-Sternberg's massacre of Russians and Jews, and his overthrow of Chinese control at Urga, inflamed the Mongols, Buriats, and Kirghisans. All the elements descended from the former Golden Horde, which once had trampled the world under the hurrying hoofs of their shaggy ponies, penetrating to the banks of the Danube and the Rhine, and had surged up against and been wrecked by the great wall of China, now rose again and streamed to the flag of this bold leader. They scented blood and robbery, and cared little for the cause they served. In one week the thirty-five increased to three hundred, and their number grew daily. Czechs and Hungarian ex-war prisoners eagerly informed the Baron of places in which the panic-stricken Reds were hiding. To satisfy his greedy band, the Baron sanctioned plunder at certain specified times, with strict orders not to touch monasteries or temples. At the close of plundering-time he personally inspected the bazaars, and woe to anyone still at the job, for he was hewn down at once. There was to be no trifling with the Baron's orders. Once at a late hour coming round a corner he met a woman carrying off a bundle of domestic chattels, and with a rope he

happened to be carrying he hanged her with his own hands. Such were his methods of keeping order!

Meanwhile he was brooding over a plan to push forward over Kiachta and Verkne-Udinsk to Russia, and there to hew his way of blood to Moscow, that heart of communism; and while he waited at Urga in sombre meditation, he entered lama monasteries and sat for hours in the mysterious gloom, before images of the thousand-armed demons and their gleaming reflections; or sought for the concealed threads of his destiny in the occult prophecies of the Hutuktu. He prayed to the gods of the country; exulting one moment and sinking the next into an abyss of sombre melancholy. His spirit of courage and daring was overshadowed by religious mania, self-accusation, and an insatiable lust for sadistic revenge.

A Soviet regiment, Red to the bone, came up against this intended invasion, which moved at a snail's pace across the steppe to the north. At Verkne-Udinsk, it was reported this regiment had gone over to the Baron's side without even a fight. But before he had left the steppes of Mongolia behind him, fate put a full stop to the course of this desperado. Some treachery amongst his slit-eyed followers, who were little used to discipline and punishment, and his uncontrolled outburst of fury against the culprits, sealed his fate, and he was taken prisoner.

In the hands of his judges the Baron fully vindicated his character. Without a tremor he acknowledged his oath to wreak vengeance as long as he was free. When told he could buy freedom by singing the first verse of the 'International,' he asked his judge first to sing the Russian National Anthem! A few hours later a salvo rang out, and the worn blue Mongolian shirt, with the star of St. George's Cross hanging from the collar, sank into the muddy puddles of the Russian prison yard at Jekaterinenberg. These events reawakened Russia's interest in Mongolia, and

Ungern-Sternberg's fall accelerated the very opposite to what he aimed at, when he broke the power of China because it barred the path of his revenge on communism.

Before the war, in 1914, these two countries, Russia and Mongolia, stood in close relation, and Russia kept strong garrisons of cossacks on Mongolian territory, especially at Urga: but when the war began, these gradually dwindled and were absorbed in the tumult of arms on European frontiers; and Mongolia receded from the immediate circle of Russian interest and passed once more under Chinese sway. Now the communists urged the Mongols to assert their complete independence of China, and in their usual way fished in the muddy waters, well knowing that in such chaotic conditions they alone could keep a clear head, and be quick to utilize everything to their own advantage.

A few vague promises that tickled curiosity were enough to catch their quarry. Sucha Bator, a Russian Mongol who had imbibed theories of world-revolution at the University of Moscow, was the channel through which these foreign and materialistic ideas were poured into Mongolia, where they had little reason or purpose. Meaningless catchwords were circulated such as: 'Every man his own master,' and 'caviare for the people.' In Mongolia every one was already his own master, and caviare did not exist at all. There was only one power – the hierarchy of priests; and religion was the only means by which the people could be subjugated, and through which according to their stage of recognition they found liberation from the austere environment of earthly existence.

Sucha Bator, encouraged by the Soviet rather than by his own convictions, proclaimed a republic in Mongolia. This in no way appealed to the people's needs but only to the Russian aim, and the populace had therefore to be worked up to the necessity of freeing themselves from hier-

archical control, and liberating their energy to participate in the rapid progress of civilization. They did not understand in what this progress consisted, but before Sucha Bator's vision swam an imaginary world which had no counterpart in Mongolian reality. This the Russians knew, but they used him in their aim to make the Mongols dependent only on themselves, and to carry the direct infection of their cult through Mongolia to China. The lamaistic hierarchy perceived storm-clouds gathering overhead and threatening to destroy their temples, so certain lamas invited Sucha Bator to pay them a visit, and were full of admiration of the new ideas; but he left their jurts a doomed man, and by next morning he was dead, though no trace of poison could be found in his body, even under the careful investigation of medical science at Moscow.

The Ochrana, however, did not fail to mete out punishment for thwarting this intrigue of the Soviet. Several lamas were arrested and executed, but without divulging the secret of their conspiracy, for the Mongol Church was prepared to defend its conservative ideas in the teeth of the Soviet, while the people remained passive and indifferent. Lamas of high rank, abbots of monasteries, children believed to be divine incarnations, all were sent to prison, and then vanished for ever. Ugly instincts were systematically encouraged, and from Russian centres a network of spying spread abroad. The Ochrana, that house at the end of the market-place, that had once been an inn kept by an Armenian, became the sinister and ill-omened headquarters, where everything was welcomed that would destroy the prevailing order; and woe to those whose names were mentioned behind its doors, for the shadow of death overtook them without proof of guilt. The passive Mongolians had drifted into ruthless hands which now gripped them by the throat. An army of Buriats – Mongols from the Russian side of the frontier – were put in charge of the

administration of Mongolian affairs, and in a few years all was changed, and the absolute power of the religious hierarchy broken; for with the death of the Hutuktu, in 1925, their last defence fell.

The Hutuktu, the recent head of the Mongolian community, was the embodiment of all these life-denying tendencies. In him they worshipped a divine incarnation. He was the bodily symbol of a revered ideal of that which logically could only exist invisibly. He was not actually God, but a divine light placed before the people to worship. Did not hundreds wander through the desert and steppes year by year, from every quarter of the compass, practising strange customs of prayer, journeying towards his holy residence in the hope of meeting the glance of his eye even for the briefest moment? Did they not prostrate themselves continually in the dust, or wander round the walls of his palace rapt in deepest meditation. To those who knew, this was the real value of such an objective symbol, though not of the person involved, except as a blind to the ignorant masses who, though they could not understand the symbolism, were nevertheless inspired with reverence. As a man he in no way represented a divine ideal or showed any desire to do so; on the contrary, he was a drunken profligate and a gross sensualist, his depraved appetites urging him to evil ways. It is reported that when he went to his unholy orgies his palanquin was carried by half-naked drunken women. Yet as it passed, the people prostrated themselves in the dust so that those women might carry their sacred burden over their bodies, and then kissed the dust or mud the carrier-women's feet had touched; crowding near to strike their foreheads against the poles of the swaying canopy, and fighting each other to obtain the Hutuktu's tipsy blessing. In the enclosures about his palace there were cages of wild animals to which he threw his victims alive. Such games amused him within, while around the

outer walls the people wandered with eyes turned inwards and threw themselves upon the dust of this holy place. Dissolute living and drink broke his health in early life, and his deranged brain became the home of all sorts of hallucinations, which were cunningly twisted into oracular sayings, to maintain his reputation of sanctity before the people, who must not be allowed to guess that a diseased and sodden brain was the real cause of these visions. So these were said to be the incorporated word of God, giving voice from within him; and his person became the object of the people's worship, for they believed blindly in his miraculous powers. To be touched by the hand of the Hutuktu was the highest blessing, to gain which they spent all they possessed, and faced the greatest trials and hardships without the quiver of an eyelash. Yet when the Tali-Lama came through Urga, in his flight from his country, he would have nothing to do with this beast in human form.

All who wore the robes of the Church were, according to popular belief, endowed with high powers. Every lama was a connecting link between man and God, apart from any mental or spiritual ability he might have. In fact, although the character covered by the red robe might be of the blackest hue, no one cared, and many a red robe did cover such blackness. Life in a monastery, the vow of celibacy, the many variations of meditation, are not enough to turn a man into a saint, unless his own personal character is above reproach. But as some good is often to be found even in an abuse, so in this case the respect and awe accorded to its robes enabled the Church to hold and strengthen the faith of the individual, and to guide him towards the path that should bring him knowledge. Once he has gained this he is ready to turn from earthly by-ways and to seek his own salvation.

Some of the priests are very ignorant, not even knowing

the meaning of the words '*Om mani padme hum*', which they utter a thousand times a day. They have a vague notion that by this repetition they will attain ultimate bliss, so the oftener they repeat the formula day and night the better for them, not realizing that the monotony of constant repetition alone will produce a hypnotic condition of bodily unawareness, whether they understand the meaning or not. The monasteries being filled with those who seek refuge in negation and evasion of life, these places are often morasses of vice, conflict, and evil possession. Yet a lama will maintain that sodomy is by no means a moral depravity, but only a stage in the withering of a life-impulse that has been checked in its natural expression, homosexuality being a compensation which a man, still in the grip of sex impulses, can accept, for it deprives his enjoyment of the wish to beget new life, and thereby loses the sinfulness of a positive act such as the begetting of new life would be!

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In a negative priest-ruled country like Mongolia, the balance fluctuates constantly between poverty and riches according to the number of cattle and sheep a man possesses, for one severe winter or an unchecked epidemic of cattle disease can bring the balance down to nil. In the general condition of apathy no preventive measures are taken, and all is left to chance or fate, the people passively suffering the consequences of its decrees.

In these regions each generation is short-lived, for men seldom attain more than forty years. Life was difficult and Spartan on this endless expanse of barren steppe country. With the old generation the old national costume of Mongolia was being discarded. Few of the women still wore the wonderful robe that expressed their mentality so well, and it was only the ignorant and stupid ones who

still acknowledged the horns the Church had put upon them, and dragged their heavy ornamented boots with upcurved toe through dust and mud, who wore long tube-like sleeves with cuffs shaped like a hoof, and high padded shoulders under the wide sweep of their two-horned horsehair wigs – all this not only as an outer symbol of an assertive life-engendering idea, but also as an inner indication, for their spiritual promptings scarcely reached beyond the blind faith that by the constant turning of prayer-wheels they would better their next life. Some of the Mongolian women now willingly adopted Soviet ideas and turned towards emancipation from their natural role in life and their national costume. These were chiefly the wives of followers of the new star, chief amongst them the wife of the Burgomeister of Urga, the leader of the women's council. I was allowed to paint her portrait, though she emphatically protested against wearing her rich national costume, and the portrait got no further than the first sittings. New Mongolia despised its old costumes, and considered the characteristic wealth of its jurts useless beside the unintelligible new rubbish that Russia offered in goods and ideas.

This race, naturally endowed with intuitive taste and artistic understanding in their own work, was helplessly uncritical before the deplorable flood of foreign dross of mechanical mass-production that inundated their markets. They fell into the gap between Eastern and Western development, with nothing to hold on to. All that Russia could offer was strange to their own ideals and material well-being, though Russia had removed their old foundations, making them entirely dependent on its will. Its own poverty and backwardness in culture became a false point of attraction to the new Mongolian generation, which readily sang the 'International' without in the least knowing why. A Mongolian army was raised and organized. Such

a thing had never existed before. Russian instructors were at the head, responsible for the spread of their propaganda. The young men of Mongolia no longer became lamas, but soldiers. The treasure of temples was annexed by the State, and their purse depleted by taxes on their sanctity, each monastery being taxed according to its name and reputed wealth, and burdened by a direct duty. A customs office was instituted through whose yards everything had to pass, whether for commercial or private use.

On my arrival at Urga I, too, had to go through this clotted sieve. My painting materials proved an insoluble mystery. The tubes of paint were opened, the canvas valued on its suitability to be turned into clothing. I was held in their claws for nearly a week, till their leader arrived at the view that all these tubes contained tooth-paste. A few Russians tried, without success, to explain my calling; for painting is a sacred occupation in Mongolia, and done exclusively by lamas, or by a few Chinese artists, and then with quite different materials. Being neither lama nor Chinese – and having materials of an unknown kind – it could only be tooth-paste. The form of the tubes, not their contents, decided my fate: a true example of the way things happened in this country, and a forewarning – had I heeded it – of the cloud of trouble that was gathering to thwart my endeavours to paint this wonderful world, doomed, and rapidly dying.

My painful pilgrimage started from this grey house at the corner of the market-place. Even in Sikkim my intention of travelling as an independent European had been doubted and the handicap of an official veto had to be evaded; but here in Mongolia things were much more difficult. I was marked from the first moment of arrival, and taken for a spy in the service of the opposition; and the Ochrana gave me a special attention which was by no means agreeable. It never entered their heads that there

was nothing to spy upon, and they worked themselves into a blind frenzy, perceiving an enemy to their cause in everyone not intimately in league with them. I had reckoned on the harmlessness of my calling to overcome obstacles, but was never believed. Hoping for freedom to paint, I tried to prove my goodwill by a straightforward and neutral attitude to all politics, but the more I tried the greater the disbelief. I finally agreed to the chorus of 'tooth-paste,' but that did not help me much. I was asked for my correspondence, and willingly submitted what I had to be censored by the Ochrana. It was very innocent; in fact, for nine months I had had no postal connection with the outer world, and knew little of what had occurred beyond my horizon of steppe and desert. A week later I was called to the Ochrana to account for my correspondence which no one could read. A few Russian letters were placed before me that had never been mine. I could not read or speak Russian, but the officials were not satisfied: on the contrary, this deepened their suspicion that I was only pretending, so as to get at their secrets. These letters had either been put amongst mine as a pitfall, or they had got mixed up with my papers in the hopeless muddle that reigned in these offices. One had as good a chance of finding letters addressed to oneself amongst the litter of paper swept into corners by the wind. My visits to the Russian Consul only resulted in further trips to the Ochrana, each more hopeless than the last. There were sheets of questions in Russian to be filled in, date of birth and nationality; whether I had fought on the Red or White side of the army; to which party I belonged; and so on. This interested the Russians only, for the Mongols had no idea where Austria was, and took no interest in the date of one's birth or one's political leanings, or the reason that brought one into Mongolia, though they were being taught that every non-Russian in their country must be a conspirator against their awakening

self-interests. A rumour from a third party was enough to prove one's guilt, and no further inquiry was needed, except in the form of bodily torture of the victim, hoping to extort information that might be useful to the Ochrana. Everyone was on the look-out for evil. Honesty and good faith and the better instincts of humanity had been exterminated by the spirit of unproductive wretchedness into which the Russian people had sunk, after freeing themselves from the knout: indeed, their thirst for freedom had led them to the very opposite, for they hoped to attain their ideal by encouraging every brutal instinct. Bat-eared Judases were busy everywhere with their denunciations; the atmosphere was heavy with suspicion, and Mongols and Russians alike gave one hostile glances of ill-will. I was forbidden to leave the town, and time no doubt was to be my accuser, while I passed days and weeks in fruitless endeavour to overcome their distrust and gain permission to paint.

One day, armed with my tubes of tooth-paste, I went out to the open space behind the market, sat down, and began to paint. But very soon the local police appeared, confiscated my Mongolian passport which they could not read, and escorted me and my sketch to the Yamen, a two-storeyed house of wood lying to the west of the hill occupied by the Galdan Monastery and its settlement of lamas. In the guard-room, with Russian rifles piled in a corner, and the guard yawning about on benches, I was left, having no idea what would be done with me. I did not know the language, and grew more and more uncomfortable as the slow hours dragged. In my despair I started to count the bugs that crawled on the wall behind the benches, or fell from the ceiling to disappear under the matting on the floor. I was being kept waiting, it seemed, for somebody who was in no hurry to come. My supply of cigarettes was soon exhausted, and in due course the setting

sun sent its rays through the dirty windows on to the floor in a pattern of rusty glow, which grew narrower each moment. Police and soldiers came and went, always reminding those who were left to keep a special eye on me. The corners of the room grew gloomy in the twilight, and then night came, and hope died. The 'Tavarish' Commander of the Yamen had not appeared that day! Perhaps *margash* (tomorrow) – a Mongolian word only too familiar to my ears. It was all I ever got out of the Ochrana, and here it had the added grievance of loss of personal freedom till tomorrow, when at the same time another *margash* might be my only consolation, and so on. I was in safe custody for the time; whether I liked it was my own affair. And so it happened till the Commander finally did vouchsafe to come. As usual, he was a young Buriat. He addressed me in Mongolian and Russian fruitlessly, repeating his effort in different words, examined my sketch through half-closed eyes, from the side, and from the distance, and could make nothing of it. Then he gave me back my passport, and I was allowed to go! As quickly as I could I did go out into the fresh air. It was always better to contemplate the Ochrana and the Yamen from outside than from within the meshes of their net of intrigues.

I went back to the Russian Consul, and after months of delay, being put off from one day to another, I was told I must obtain a paper from the Soviet Minister of Instruction permitting me to sketch in the open air. It took me another month of daily endeavour to approach the august presence of this Minister of Instruction. He, too, was a Buriat, shortly back from a journey through Russia and Germany. To my question how he liked it, he answered cynically in bad German *Deutsches Mädchen serr gutes Mensch* (German girls very good). Every day the post brought letters from Germany addressed to 'His Excellency the Minister of Culture and Education.' Germany, Austria,

and France were vying for patronage from young Mongolian talent, and offering free education at their universities, hoping thereby to gain Mongolia's friendship. A month before, fifteen Mongolian youths had been sent to Germany; yet the treatment I met with and the constant obstacles placed in my way were the only thanks for all the cordial reception this Minister had received in German-speaking countries. The more the white races had outbidden each other in friendliness to this man, the more puffed up and self-important he became. He considered himself greater than any king, and treated me like scum, denying me admittance, letting me wait for hours, and then going away without noticing me. I kept a polite surface and bowed to his slouchiness. The Russian, Alexander Petrovitch, with his constant 'Nitchivo,' and the stoical philosophy these hopeless conditions engendered in him, often strengthened my sinking courage. Nothing upset him, not even storming the place ten times a day without result. This absolute passivity was typically Russian, whether Red or White, and part of the Asiatic soul within them. They appeared to me at times like beings in a dream-complex where the body cannot move and the mind weaves fantastic theories.

Finally my persistence was rewarded – in this country where time has no value, and by this man who was chiefly accustomed to dealings with cattle. He demanded a written statement that I would give him half my work – needs must when the devil drives; so I agreed, and was given permission to paint out of doors for a month. With renewed courage I started work and chose the horse market, a sandy open space where the ponies stood patiently in the blazing sun, tied by their halter reins to a rope stretched between two posts, waiting for a buyer. This place was of special interest to the local police on the look-out for stolen ponies, a game in which the Mongols were expert – for once seen

a pony could always be recognized with unfailing intuition, since they were keen judges, and accustomed to live in the saddle almost from birth.

I had scarcely begun to work when the police appeared; but protected by this paper from high authority I felt safe. Luckily there were some lamas near who could read the paper. All went well, and after much talk the paper was given back to me, while the police smoked my cigarettes and were puzzled over my tubes of paint. Next day I returned to the spot, and noticed many of the yellow-waistcoated police waiting close by. I wondered? Scarcely had I opened my stool and seated myself and was looking about, taking in the atmosphere, when some of the police came and squatted beside me, taking my proffered cigarettes amicably. More came, but I felt I must not be unduly alarmed, so I took a sheet of paper and drew the hind quarters of a pony. I had hardly drawn enough to make it recognizable when the policeman next to me pulled my sleeve and asked for the signed paper of yesterday. This he stuffed unread into his sweat-laden coat and told me sharply to follow him. A cordon of his colleagues formed round me, one even got his rifle ready, for white men like myself are apparently capable of anything. I packed up, the others mounted their ponies, and so ended my third day of liberty to work.

We again went to the Yamen. My good star brought Alexander Petrovitch along, and he joined the escort. I entered the well-known room and found five Russian civilians sitting there in dirty disarray, guarded by some bandy-legged Mongol soldiers. Alexander Petrovitch pushed straight up to the Commandant and a long argument started. My papers were examined with much shaking of heads. The police were anxious to arrest me and search my lodging. The Russians were indolent, and the Mongols, not understanding Russian, did not know

what it was all about. At last my papers were folded up, and the Commandant prepared to take us to the Ochrana. Yamen and Ochrana – every path I took seemed to end there. As we left I caught the poignant look of one of the five Russians. It was like the last glance of an animal before its throat is cut.

At the Ochrana we waited in the passage and the Commandant vanished behind a door guarded by soldiers with bayonets. They wore dirty ochre-coloured clothes and torn Russian boots, had pointed caps aslant on their greasy shaven heads, and looked as if they longed to thrust their bayonets into some human body – no matter whose. On the previous night the guard before the people's bank had put the barrel of his rifle at the head of his relief-guard, and blown out his brains. Presently we were asked to enter. The huge Buriat in a European felt hat, well known to me by now, sat before a table. For the fourth time he asked me if I knew Esperanto, spoke a few words, and wrote them playfully on paper. It was all so maddening and absurd. No one here apparently knew that great personage, His Excellency the Minister of Culture and Education, who had given me this useless permit – only a pass from the Ochrana could help me. The Buriat kept back the paper and the sketch of the pony's quarters and said he would inquire into this matter. Anyway, he let me go, and I was really grateful. The Commandant of the Yamen made a wry face at my slipping through his fingers – suspicion being his first, conspiracy his last word. Suspicion had let me into this country and had locked the doors behind me, and there was no going back. Alexander Petrovitch only said, 'Nitchivo.'

On our way home in the twilight a group of people passed in front of us shuffling up columns of dust with their slow, dragging steps. Three soldiers behind with rifles at full cock, two at each side, three in front, and in the centre

the five Russians we had seen in the afternoon. Alexander Petrovitch held me back, took off his hat, and turned aside. They were going to the other end of the town to an open space, clear of houses and jurts. A Russian soldier riding up behind us saw the sad group and reined in his mount. Alexander Petrovitch said never a word. When I told him the next morning that at nine that night several volleys of shots were heard from the east, he laid his finger to his lips and said, 'Nitchivo.' Such incidents took place almost daily, and were never discussed. One cruel punishment had recently been abolished – the victim being enclosed in a narrow coffin-like case and fed through a hole. The case was put standing up in some underground place with a label of the offender's crime and term of punishment, and was never opened or cleaned. One would think that no one could live long shut up like that and smothered in his own filth. Yet some managed to live for a year or two, death only taking place after they had been liberated at the end of their term. This punishment was meted out for hunting on the holy hill, the Bogdo-Ul, also for murder, horse theft, and brigandage. At present the mere suspicion of having a political leaning different from the official Russian one was enough to put a full stop to a man's life. The prisons were filled with Russians, Chinese, and Mongols, with lamas and children, innocent obstacles to the influence of the Soviet. They vanished like shadows and no questions were asked. The verdict of the dreaded Ochrana was the first and last word, and any sort of denunciation was enough to bring a man short shrift without further inquiry.

A Russian forester had been appointed to a place about three hundred miles to the west of Urga, who in the pursuit of his duties forbade the cutting down of trees, telling the villagers to collect the fallen branches. This did not suit one or two Mongols, who rode off to Urga and denounced him as being anti-Soviet. Two days later he was seized, brought

to Urga, and thrown into prison. When I was told his story he had been in prison eight months, and having no friends or relatives to help him, he may still be there, if alive.

I heard of another mysterious affair of four Japanese languishing in prison for four and a half years. Mongolia was a sealed book to the world outside. No power but Russia had recognized its republic, and there were no official representatives of other nations, so every foreigner came at his own risk, was completely at their mercy, and could be dealt with as they wished.

I heard nothing more about my papers, nor did I get sanction to paint in the open. My request to leave the country was also ignored ; I was forbidden to leave Urga, and was all but a prisoner. My only chance of retreat had been the moment I entered the country, and having missed that, they were waiting for an opportunity to wipe me off the slate. I had made several friends, some genuine, and others who under that name spied upon me. Finally liberation came in an unexpected way.

The Council intended to erect a monument to Sucha Bator. Hearing of this I offered to make a sketch for it, free, provided the Ochrana gave me liberty of movement. The execution of the monument would have taken me to China, as it could not be cast locally. By this offer I hoped to convince the Mongols that art alone had brought me into this flamboyant world of theirs, which in a few years would fade and die, and that my one desire was to paint the rare pomp of this strange region before it was utterly destroyed by semi-civilized influences. The Mongols were already discarding their vain and useless gods, and dreaming of factories in the place of temples, of tramways and railway engines and aeroplanes. The more they broke up their old world the more they believed themselves on the path of progress. Russia had made many promises, but was

herself as pitiably in arrears in the general progress of civilization as were these Mongols, yet firmly believed she could bring the rest of the world down to her level by turning its natural order upside down.

I procured estimates from a casting firm in China and began the sketch. Models were easy enough to obtain, now that the Mongolians were interested in the matter. A horse and rider were at my disposal, and I was shown Sucha Bator's sword of honour, a present from Russia, of Caucasian enamel set with rubies and diamonds. The sketch was soon completed, and I only wished I had been able to make others, which were far more important, as easily. However, the cost was prohibitive, and the plan over which the Mongols had been so enthusiastic fell through. I did not altogether regret its ending thus: in fact, it was a relief, for in the uncertain conditions in China and Mongolia the difficulties of completing the task would have been greater than these good people imagined. My great desire to be allowed to paint in peace seemed attained at last, but disappointment still dogged my steps. The permission was whittled down, and another month was passed in daily visits to the Ochrana to obtain sanction to leave Urga. As soon as the scheme for the monument was abandoned, the old distrust and suspicion rose again.

On my crossing the Mongolian frontier my firearms had been taken from me; these were now returned to me a year later in a useless condition, the locks torn from the cases, and the ammunition used up. But on the strength of their promise I had already hired a caravan to set out for the west of Mongolia, where, from reports, I hoped to find better conditions for painting; and should this trip fail, I hoped by some means to get permission to leave Mongolia. Finally the permission to leave Urga, for a while only, was given, but not to leave the country.

My reason for wanting to go to the west was because a

Russian had given me such enthusiastic reports about it. He was in charge of a veterinary station, trying to combat cattle disease in western Mongolia, and described in vivid colours the paradise I would find, and where I could paint my fill without any trouble, everything being in its original unspoilt condition. The more vodka he poured down his gullet the more vivid grew his descriptions. He was of a vigorous constitution, and showed sure indications of Mongolian blood. He had a broad pock-marked skull, the lower part beardless and of brutelike disproportion, thin compressed lips and small grey eyes with a hard glint, a squat nose and narrow nostrils. His head was set on shoulders that sloped like the neck of a bottle. He was full of raw, but not intelligent force. His wife was a transparent creature with a sunken chest and eyes deep-set in hollow cavities, hectic cheek-bones, and forehead puckered up in wrinkles, and with a constant little cough. She dressed in cheap provincial smartness, playing the role of a Parisian in her Russian way – a soldier's wife, for he had been a cossack from some Caucasian state, trying to ape the super-elegance of a city-bred officer's lady. As she came and went, the husband, a poor fish longing to return to its native element, told endless tales of the riding-feats and sword-dances of cossack regiments; he swore at everything, at Russia, at Mongolia, at their ponies, and at the way they rode them like oxen; and in the same breath he told of fighting and hitting about him in the Revolution. He was one of those who, being dissatisfied with himself, would like to destroy all he could lay hands on.

We agreed to travel westward together, to where his work lay. His wife was to follow in a month or two by car, if there was a chance; but she was glad to stay on at Urga for the present, where the Russian community could appreciate her appearance, and where competition amongst the white women was an incentive to the imported elegance

which appeared to be the most important factor in her life. What matter if the monsoon turned the streets into a sea of mud, reflecting the dingy Russian houses, so long as her evening shoes were of the correctest cut. She was always trying to convince herself that she was a woman of the world, though she had never been beyond her own little provincial circle and knew Paris only from novels and old-fashioned papers, aping their ways, however unsuitable to her present environment. American and English women, touring the world in luxurious cabins and seeing foreign countries from the angle of first-class hotels, occasionally came up from Kalgan by car, equipped as though prepared to climb to the moon, in practical boots, and breeches, and covert-coats, and with a revolver in their serviceable pockets; full of courage and sportsmanship, though often a little lacking in womanliness. Even as they were out after adventures they never found, so this Russian woman turned from the high boots of her own world to the silken stockings of distant Paris.

By the end of February we left Urga and fell in with a caravan bound for Ulliasutai which had to reach its destination in a given time. This was fortunate, for it meant that we would not need to urge our people as much as usual, and we could arrange our provisions for a month's journey. We were to start at 9 a.m., but I stood about amongst the camels till four in the afternoon, before we set out in a swaying swinging chain towards the west. For this first day we unfolded our tents and camped outside Urga, and at the first grey of dawn the journey began in earnest and was to be made in much longer marches than the Russian and I had anticipated. An hour's rest when the sun was at midday, then an uninterrupted swaying progress till 2 a.m., and a quick camp for two or three hours' sleep. And then while I was hammering the iron tent-pole into the ground the Russian had thrown himself

MONGOLIAN CARAVAN LEADER

down, drawn his fur over him, and fallen into a loglike sleep; though I lay for some time with the feeling of still being carried, swaying through the world in the monotonous rhythm of pacing camels still upon me, while I looked back on all the fruitless efforts of the past year. Travelling through this wide landscape brought back unwelcome memories of former journeys and half maddened me into the disbelief in better conditions ever falling to my share. Always this familiar reaching forward of one's gaze over the vast undulating horizon, with that feeling of having lost all sense of distance; this seeming so near and never getting anywhere. It was characteristic of all one's dealing with these people, who were always moving away, always keeping distance, like the wild animals on the steppes. No approach to these latter along a straight line was possible, there being no cover. One might try to get closer by crawling, but the distances were deceptive, and so one advanced with rifle and field-glasses, along the edges of swamps, through pools and morass, wet to the bone and covered in mud, utterly deceived by the clarity of the atmosphere, to become exhausted long before reaching shooting distance, a steady aim and quick shot being impossible. Then a bullet falling far short of its aim proves once more how hopelessly out one's reckoning has been in spite of all caution. And the sharp-sighted game, startled by the sound of the shot, have spotted the danger and begun to move, keeping distance at the rate of one's own progress.

During such weeks of travelling one comes on herds of antelope up to a thousand strong, especially in spring, when the people burn their pasture-land, and the fire spreads in wide tongues over the plains. Then through the ashes of last year's grass the new growth soon shoots up, fresh and succulent. And the deer gather in great herds which from the distance look like little grey stones strewn

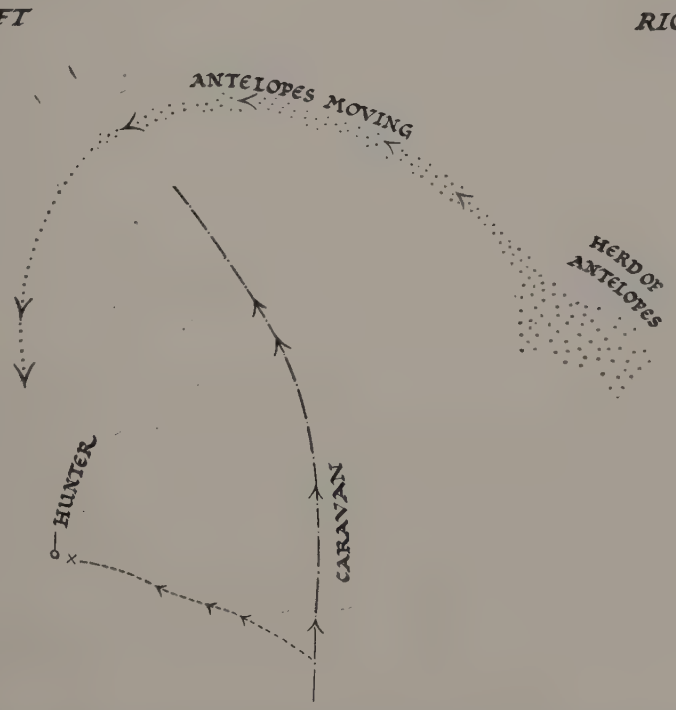
about the ground. By the time one is within eight or ten kilometres one has been spotted, and when one is about a mile from them, they start moving and keeping distance. Keeping on the right side of the wind, or pretending to move away will not help, for once spotted, every movement is observed, and the animals invariably move at the same rate as the disquieting object they watch. One soon realizes that stalking is useless. Four miles away the deer can be seen grazing peacefully; at two and a half miles or less, the field-glass reveals all heads turned towards one, the animals grazing, and looking up and beginning imperceptibly to move.

In view of one of these herds I once asked a native to shoot an animal, and it was interesting to watch his method of procedure. He took a quick look round, pointed several times to the sun, and then starting off to the left was soon out of sight, covered by a long swell of the ground. The herd were on our right, and at first I thought he was trying to keep them to the windward. We proceeded straight ahead, and I expected the deer to move off further to the right, and away from the shooter's path; but to my surprise, falling into our rate of speed they curved to the left, always well ahead, and eventually crossed our path in front of us, though we were gradually moving to the left. Like a parade of graceful cavalry on slender legs, they moved single file, in a long grey line over the undulating ground, and disappeared in the direction our sportsman had taken. After a while I could spy the herd again through my field-glasses, between the folds of the ground, grouped together and grazing, but moving all the time in the same semicircle, curving backwards. Suddenly a spark shot out about forty metres from the herd, and a small cloud rose, while the shot sounded across like a sharp crack of a whip. One gazelle fell to its knees, while the herd sprang apart in all directions. It was an astounding bit of native sportsman-

YAK HUNTER

ship, of masterly calculation of time and distance, and of accurate knowledge of the animals' habits.

I noticed this same procedure in herds of yaks, wild asses, or antelopes, always keeping distance and crossing the path of the approaching caravan. There is always one leading animal who keeps a sharp look-out for any point



of suspicion, keeps this steadily in view, and passes before it at a curved angle. The flight of the leader in the opposite direction would mean losing sight of the suspicious object and its movements.

The powerful influence of the snake's eye on its victims is, I believe, based on this same instinct of not letting the danger out of sight. Wild asses would occasionally get

separated from their herd, and then kept parallel with our caravan for miles, rather than lose it from view.

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During the day a hot sun poured down on us from a radiant sky, and made us shed our furs. The Mongols stripped to the waist and hunted for lice, which they threw away unharmed. The moment the sun appeared the temperature rose rapidly, to fall as rapidly when it sank, while an icy breath mercilessly penetrated every fur and covering, forcing us to dismount for warmth's sake and walk beside the camels for the rest of the night. This progress step by step beside the soft springy camels' feet pressing the ground with spongy pads, while we seemed to be moving through the velvety ocean of a star-filled atmosphere, still pervades my dreams.

Thus we were one night proceeding, with the camels now and then snorting to clear their nostrils from the frosty air, when a sudden violent gust of wind hit us. In a flash the leading riders are out of their saddles, have jerked the following string of camels to a standstill with excited cries of '*Zock! Zock!*' tugging at nose-strings to make the animals kneel. A second gust rushes at us, slapping wet splodges against my face, howling and whistling over the steppes. Slip-knots are hastily loosened, loads fall on each side of the camels; all the Mongols work like mad, and in a moment the black tent is flapping like a huge sail in the wind. With wild cries the men hang on to its ends, but the gale hurls us to and fro with the flapping tent, while out of the darkness white flakes the size of saucers rush horizontally at us. Thicker and thicker they come, and in a few seconds all is a flying wall of parallel lines, like a snowstorm seen from an express train. The wind howls and barks, making such a din that each of us is isolated as though in a great

silence. Even the axe hitting the iron tent-pole might be patting on cotton wool; one can see nothing, not even one's own hand held before one's eyes. We throw ourselves down and creep along the tent wall. A pace away one might get lost and crawl out into the wide desolation. The gale rushes into the tent and wrenches it from within, loosening the pegs and banging them from side to side. By the gleam of a pocket lamp I see the floor of the tent ankle deep in snow, silting up in the corners like the curve of a Chinese roof. Yet barely a quarter of an hour ago we were walking peacefully under a clear starry sky beside our camels! Had the men lost one moment we should have been helpless. Presently the fury of the squall abated slightly; a sheet of snow seemed to be rushing towards us, and the light of my electric torch ricocheted off a sliding white wall. We lay all night shaken by the cold, for there had been no time to get at our bedding or the sack of dried cattle dung.

By the morning our tent was buried in a drift of virginal white snow, the entrance flanked by a sharp-edged overhanging wall the height of a man, over which a clear cold sky with up-shooting sunbeams shone into the tent, now taut and solid as a stone wall under its burden of snow. We burrowed into the drift with our hands, throwing our bodies forward and sideward to make a way. The exercise did us good, and brought our congealed circulation into working order again. Snow lay shoulder deep in a flat sheet to the horizon. Nothing was to be seen of our camels but a row of gentle mounds, like round bubbles on the sugared surface of a cake. On the lee side of each there was a sloping hollow, the camels' snow-covered flanks forming the wall. By midday the sun had melted the snow into running streams, and we had shovelled the camp free and stood once more on the ground. The camels had taken no harm, and came out of their snowy caves, their wiry

fur all encrusted with lumps and knots like lumps of sugar. During the storm they lay still and their bodily warmth increased under the covering of snow; while we in our thick sheepskins hardly knew how to bear the cold, working our arms about our bodies, and jumping from one leg to the other, as far as the low tent roof would allow, and fighting sleep which might have been fatal.

We had to pass over great tracks of swampy ground where much time was lost, for it was difficult and dangerous going for the caravan. The camel's foot, so wonderfully adapted for loose sand, is very awkward on slippery ground. Its broad spongy sole slides helplessly under the weight of the body and behaves like wet rubber. Therefore the ground has to be probed most carefully, and the men had to wander ahead for miles looking out for possible crossings. Often the swampy clay is covered by thin green moss which gives way under the camels' sliding feet. A few yards of such ground can be the doom of a whole caravan, so the Mongols probe in all directions, stamping their heels on the ground and jumping from one leg to the other to test its carrying power. If water appears at the edge of their boots the caravan must change its course; and so we wind and double for hours, returning sometimes to within a short distance of the starting-point; as we curve and turn we have the sun sometimes on our right, at our back, on the left, or facing us, and on all sides that suspicious green carpet spread for miles. Brahmani ducks sit about in pairs, the sunlight drawing out the coppery glints of their plumage. They have a weird, haunting cry, a lament of utter loneliness and strange melancholy like the last cry of dying hope, beyond the reach of tears. Mongol legends say it is the sad, restless cry of a princess calling for her vanished lover.

A lake gleams through the gloom of night like a dull silver mirror on a black ground. Darkness had come upon us before we were clear of the swampy ground, and the

camels lay down, knowing that any step in the dark might be their doom. Over us the sky unfolds in endless infinity, its grandeur and unfailing comfort growing upon me more and more, all the anxieties and fatigues of the day falling away under its wonderful aspect. Almost at the end of the swampy region, a few steps from firm ground, one of the camels slipped, and its load fell on its rump as it began to struggle and kick helplessly. The Mongols at once got busy with the following camels and led them on to firm ground before attending to the fallen one, or the confusion of its fall might have brought disaster to the rest. Then its load was taken off and carried by us to firm ground, and the camel was got out by spreading clothes under its legs. After that it limped along at the end of the line, getting lamer every day. The Mongols felt under its hot shoulder, and shook their heads. One morning it could not rise, and was left behind watching its comrades swaying off in a long line to the horizon, diminishing in size and vanishing. When they return in a few months they will find a brown framework of bones with matted wool lying about in hunks.

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After a month of daily marches of forty miles, we reach our goal, a monastery built in mixed style and spread along the brow of a hill between forests. There were the white many-windowed fronts of Tibetan lama dwellings with their flat roofs and palisaded yards, boxed against each other; and curved clay temple roofs all clustered round a central temple with a flaming golden roof, at the corners of which soft bells tinkle in the wind; bursts of trombones sound out vaguely, cymbals clash: the heartbeat of a holy city.

The settlement was situated at the mouth of the valley, and at one end there were a few Russian houses quite out

of keeping with the surrounding jurts, lying haphazard about the open spaces, or enclosed by high palisades. Before entering the town, our part of the caravan separated from the rest that were bound for a still further western goal. We proceeded to the customs yard and had hardly been there half an hour when Kasakbajeff came back with our papers signed, accompanied by another Russian, who at once offered to put me up, and sent off my luggage to his house. He expanded in open-hearted hospitality, and eagerly promised to help me in smoothing out my way in Mongolia. It proved to be but a gust of friendly sand blown into my eyes under the nirvanic influence of vodka, for the next morning when I came back from a short walk I found my luggage in the yard and my friend of yesterday before a samovar in a clean but shabby room, very pleased with having found a way out of the hospitable predicament he had needlessly undertaken the day before! He said he was about to leave for Kalgan or some other place . . . his children needed schooling . . . they were getting spoilt here. . . . There was a curious note in his voice, and between his words lurked an urge to get away, to go south, to reach the gates of a new world. In sudden despair he asked if I could teach him English, and brought out a book: *Perfect English in Eight Weeks*. While sober he made many good resolutions, which never materialized; also he was completely dominated by his wife, in spite of his bushy moustaches and melancholy eyes. She was a tall, slender Russian, with lowered eyes that avoided me, a neurotic mystery to the tips of her fair hair. She was given to sudden escapades, from which she invariably returned to her husband and children; and she was jealous of any independence on his part.

I returned to Kasakbajeff, who had brought me here by his fair promises, and only the day before had assured me I should always find a place under his roof, but now that

I wanted to take him at his word he was armed with a host of impossibilities wrapped in excuses. Having travelled so far the only thing I could do was to buy a jurt of my own and get to work, amidst all this wealth of interesting things around me. I took my papers from the museum authorities at Urga to the local police, and Kasakbajeff accompanied me to the Commander's jurt just to explain my profession as a painter, and to interpret the papers, which were in Mongolian.

The officer, a Buriat, dissembling his ignorance of Russian, smilingly added his signature to the paper, and took for granted that all was in order. I thought this precious paper would now give me full power to paint at leisure in Red Mongolia, and innocently took it to the monastery. The abbot received me in the customary manner, but handed back the paper unread, saying neither 'yes' nor 'no' to my request to be allowed to paint in the monastery. That, he said, would depend entirely on the incarnate Buddha of the monastery, but he, alas, was in prison at Urga! He had been there some years with others of his hierarchy, carrying the prison slops down to the dismal grey stream, guarded by Russian rifles. Consequently everything that came from Urga was met with relentless though passive resistance. To make matters worse, the man who had given me this document had been here a short while before, confiscating the property of this very monastery, and in my ignorance I had led the abbot to think I was travelling in Mongolia under the flag of the Soviet, and was an adherent of the enemy. I could not offend this dignified patriarch by urging my request, or protesting my innocence; for this letter, and being accompanied by one of the Russians who were busy undermining the faith of the country with their anti-plagues injections, seemed ample proof. I soon found that it was the sanction of these lamas and not the word of a Russian that was needed to get models amongst the laity;

also that these were mostly poor nomadic folk, with little display of costume, such as was found amongst the richer and more aristocratic population of Urga; and here they were still under complete control of the Church.

There was a Mongol employed at the veterinary station whose wife was to be persuaded to sit as model. It was difficult to make the man understand why she was to wear her state clothes and ornaments. Kasakbajeff tried to explain what making a picture was, by handling a camera. The next morning the woman appeared in full rig, but seeing no camera she ran away again at once. A further attempt resulted in exactly ten minutes' sitting, at the end of which the woman, pretending to fetch something from her hut, vanished, and did not return. Kasakbajeff said, 'Nitchivo'; he would take the matter into his own hands. I waited for a week and then found that this idea had petered out, as most things did, in the sand of Mongolia. This woman was the only model Kasakbajeff could procure, and on the strength of this he had advised me to take such a long journey!

I had ample time while here to study the mentality of the Russian group gathered in this place, for during the long sunny days they lounged about with little to do. There was the vet., Peter Andrejvitch, from one of the Volga districts, an undersized young fellow, who did not disguise his anti-Soviet leanings; Jakof Davidof Pogoreluk from Kiev, a green mooncalf, sprouting the first hairs of a fair beard, and as strong as a bull; a former captain of cossacks in the black elegance of cavalry cut, always carrying a slender cane, and suffering from a consumptive chest and an overworked heart; the postmaster, a rotund Asiatic Russian with a sickle-shaped moustache and a Russian military cap, much too small, perched aslant on his round, clean-shaven head – he had been sergeant-major in charge of some infantry barracks, but the addresses

of letters had to be spelt out to him; there was also another vet. from Harbin with thick lips that squirted profusely when he spoke, and who suffered from heart and kidney disease; and Kasakbajeff, who hailed from Stanitza in the Caucasus; also the pale-faced Russian with melancholy eyes and bushy moustache, from the district of Orloff; and Ivan Sedoff from Novgorod, chauffeur-mechanic from Urga, fanatic and communist to the bone.

This queer group spent long evenings together, in heated sterile arguments. The intelligence of Peter Andrejvitch far surpassed the brutal mechanical mind of the Soviet fanatic, Ivan Sedoff. The postmaster sat like an ox before a barn door; Jakof Davidof plucked at the strings of his balaleika; the cavalry captain, back from his solitary rides over the wide plains, sat silently engrossed in his elegant sufferings, a figure from the boulevards of Moscow, married to a Russian who babbled French, of which he could not understand a word; the vet. from Harbin drowsed off, nodding in his chair, as soon as the meal was over; Kasakbajeff was always ready with an enthusiastic account of some cossack attack. They all drank vodka like water, debating and arguing till early dawn streaked the sky.

I would sit listening and noticing how they distrusted each other. Innate superstition, vulgarity, and despair, with an admixture of hope, showed through their heated words. They had a bent for plunging into the darkest and most complicated situations imaginable, with spiteful impulses, quick irritability, and a lust for tyranny. The irascible Peter Andrejvitch would thrust his chaotic and ridiculous theories at the fanatical mechanic. Kasakbajeff was like a strong animal which, when not harnessed to duty, could only break out into mischief. They all suffered from soul-complexes that had their origin in Asia and were complicated by race mixture. Aimless and declimatized, they longed to get away from all this confusion, and back

to a solid foundation, but could only cry for help; the whole of this noisy world-revolution of theirs was a cry for help. Its failure soon cooled their ardour, though the contagion of poison spread from Russia to the countries round, developing similar symptoms. Signs of a general convalescence were not apparent, least of all in Russia. The peasants were satisfied to be free of control, and became lazier than ever. The labourers were free, and did not know what to do with their freedom. All incentive to work was abolished by a reversal of class order, and the liberated elements were mastered by a fear of party, worse than before; hatred ruled this topsy-turvy world of rising and falling individuals. Many were flung into the mire for no reason, and though so far unconnected with politics, they now formed contra-revolutionary parties out of sheer dissatisfaction with Soviet methods of trying to give the world a new face overnight, by exterminating the ruling class, and by holding them responsible for the condition in Russia and elsewhere. For the Russian revolution aimed at being more than an internal crisis: it wanted to become a world programme, to break the power of capitalism everywhere. In other countries capital was greater and more powerful than in Russia; and, lacking this solid foundation, Russia would have to lag more and more in the rear of progressive civilization. The hidden reason for the Russian revolution may possibly be found in the Russian attitude towards positive work; envying the progress of others, they remained unwilling to exert themselves, or to work as others did. Industry was not in them. They showed the opposite extreme to practical European enterprise in general. Possessing one of the wealthiest countries in the world, they were too lazy to harness all this potential wealth to their own use; their constant stumbling-block being procrastination and lack of determination. They dreamed ahead with visionary and unreliable enthusiasm, never depending on

themselves but always on someone else. And they looked upon their antiquated theory of a world revolution as a certain cure for their own backwardness in civilization, without imagining that they were themselves responsible for their condition. Help was to come from without, never from within. Money, urgently required for more useful purposes, was poured into the bottomless sieve of propaganda, while their available capital was already all too limited, lacking the foundation of productive work, the materials for which lay ready to hand.

An enslaved proletariat had risen *en masse* against the knout of compulsion which drove them to work, but as soon as the peasants and labourers were freed from the yoke of authority they reduced their work to a minimum, whereas, working in their own interests, they should have increased it to a maximum, cultivating their vast plains for the general benefit, and not merely for bare individual need.

Peasants refused to cultivate the land except for their own immediate wants. A large controlling party had to supervise their councils, for, because of this boasted freedom, the people were without bread, some districts even suffering from a worse famine than had ever been experienced under Tsarist rule. Even today ration cards for the more primitive essentials were in use, and I myself saw a queue of starving people waiting three days outside closed food stores, during the May celebrations of the world-revolution in Moscow, and this while America, England, and Denmark were sending food to the starving districts! Such were the crude contradictions! These hungry people were not the victims of the great war, which punished all nations more or less justly: they were the victims of the Russian revolution which did not aim at driving the world into peace, but into increasing chaos and disruption.

When an apple has ripened fully, it will in due course

fall from the tree, without needing to be shaken off. But of all people the Russians were least ready to live up to the standard of ideas such a revolution necessitated. It simply increased the discontent of the masses till in a blind frenzy of destruction they broke all existing laws. But how can mere discontent with oneself and one's condition prove a capacity for ideal enjoyment of freedom? A will to work, held in check by some obstruction, can, when liberated, embody an ideal force – but no such will existed in the Russian character, and the result soon showed the value of the old knout as an incentive to work, for without it lethargy was uncurbed. Had the Russian people been endowed with this will power, how different would their position have been to-day.

On the fruitful soil of Siberia, such as no other country can equal, the Russian peasants failed utterly when the land was given into their charge and they were asked, with their liberated power, to work it for the common good. They preferred to get drunk and let the fields lie fallow. The sweat of work brought no personal reward, therefore rather than work they preferred to go to prison or to be put to the wall and shot. Outwardly the revolution had failed to spread over all the world, and within Russia its effects began to be disastrous; so the world was stormed with even greater vehemence, all being staked on winning the outer battle the more untenable the dictum of the Soviet became within the country itself. Aggression concentrated more and more against England; by decreasing her field of influence in Asia it might be possible to sever one of her chief arteries. The damages of the war were made a profitable reason for persecution, Russia's sole aim being to undermine the existing organization of foreign capital and thereby to destroy the main channel that supplied the civilized world with the means of rapid development, thus bringing others down to her own level,

and getting an equal start. Then with her fertile virgin soil, containing great potential wealth, Russia would no doubt come out foremost. It only meant annexing the experience and industrial methods which other countries had gained by sheer hard work. By the superinducing of so-called brotherliness amongst the proletariats of all the world, other nations were to yield their mental ascendancy and prior right of progress to those who, possessing great wealth of soil, had done nothing with it. They feared the foreign spirit of industry getting the upper hand, hence the desperate upholding of communal dogmas in which work is regarded as mere duty without material benefit. Where is the Russian peasant who will cultivate his land for the common good? This view very forcibly contradicts the loud proclamations of ideal cooperation among the working classes of the world.

It seems that the capable few have always been sacrificed to the insufficiency of the incapable many, who for some good reason apparently predominate in this unequal world. Any human intervention that would forcibly alter this law is a mistake, and stands or falls as such, so long as man is an expression of creation within certain recognized limits. Any capacity to rise above these laws and prescribed limits proves the development of a superhuman or divine quality.

Most of these revolutionary ideas, however, are simply phantasmagoria, as the impracticability of their realization indicates. They are but human distortions of high ideals not held by the mass. In the speculative purpose for which this revolution was used by Russia lies its weakness. The Russian people were by no means ready to carry out the ideal of a great commune. It was to them, as to the rest of the world, an artificial problem that was being engrafted on war-weary and exhausted nations, and partly succeeded. assuming international features and thriving for a while

when held up before conquering nations by a defeated minority. The revolutionary party in Russia was such a minority hoping to swell its numbers through increasing the labouring class; but the ignorant masses maintained the neutral ground of indifference to those contending currents. These masses consisted of genuine anarchists, prepared to overthrow everything, no matter in which direction. They helped to destroy the old order, though they remained unconvinced by the new. Such anarchism is a typical example of the Russian mentality. Never working on a definite basis, it consciously becomes a burdensome yoke on the neck of the individual, driving him to his ruin. There were millions of people in Russia prepared, for this reason alone, to overthrow what had just been attained: they were sitting idle and passive, waiting for some sort of external incentive. Had this been given by competent leadership, a complete turnabout would have happened in Russia; but although the suitable element was ready, the lead was not given. A colonel of the Tsar's army who had succeeded in reaching China safely, undertook a journey into Red Russia. He wandered through it from east to west, passing from one friend to another of his own way of thinking, although some of them held official positions at the time in the executive police: which shows the questionable strength of the present regime. The many preventive measures that had to be taken betrayed the corruption and untrustworthiness that pervaded the country.

During long nights of heated discussion I listened to these descriptions of mad conditions, but the cause of all this was never mooted, namely, themselves; always ready to be led into new mental experiments, entangling themselves in dark and complicated situations; a crowd set free from all authority and in need of fear to guide and control them. A false and deceptive propaganda could excite them to the

pitch of frenzy, seeking to augment its artificial power by outer triumphs because it stood on unsound ground. The interior decay and ruin of Russia had to be anxiously veiled from the outer world. Every official deputation from outside had to have sand strewn in its eyes before it could be convinced that the revolution had greatly improved the general conditions. Kasakbajeff grew overheated now and then about things he did not understand. He spat at the communists in whose service he was, and for whom he had fought, obsessed by the dreadful demon of destruction that would allow no tree to grow skyward unmolested. The mechanic and the vet. taunted him with being a favourite with the communists, at which he began to rave; till suddenly his voice broke and altered. He took up his glass of vodka, but put it back hesitatingly, his other hand at the same time going with a quick jerk to the collar of his Russian blouse. Then he thumped his fist on his strong, narrow chest and with a painful, inarticulate cry, like an animal, turned towards me saying, 'Anarchist,' and then his body doubled up, and he fell with a thud upon the wooden floor. His limbs writhed in contortions, and the foam of an epileptic fit came to his mouth. '*Tak*,' the vet. exclaimed, as he stood up with his hands in his trouser pockets. But the mechanic took a mouthful of water, and blew it roughly into the pale face of the unfortunate wretch.

When I got to my jurt I found it locked from within, and heard the surprised whisperings of the young balaleika-plucking mooncalf and the soldier's lady of fashion.

This was a night of unexpected adventure, I thought, as I glanced at the clear silvery sky on which a half-moon had travelled towards the hour of dawn, over a silent breathing earth. I remembered the words of a lama: The actions of a human being are subconscious reaction to an uncontrollable force which employs him as a tool. Again, his actions are expressions of intuitive character, seeking to

establish an equilibrium in which all must eventually find its solution. Creation as an embodiment of its elemental archetype is a self-developing expression in form, tending towards its furthest limit or summit, and exhausting itself thereby. The millions of beings coming and going are merely reactions of a force urging towards that moment of climax in every physical and psychical variation always under this law. All actions therefore are only a symbol of a stage of development.

On the rising slope of hills the monastery lay bathed in the silver moonlight of a peaceful night. Clearly visible are its many little square windows and its yards divided by palisades, like open boxes. Above all the golden roof of its chief temple gleams like a pale mirror of fluid silver, sheltering the group of demons that surround the Buddha-image of wisdom.

THE TWILIGHT OF DEMONS

A Mongol came riding home after a prolonged hunting trip for marmot-skins, of which a harvest now dangled in bunches from his saddle. They were short-haired skins, all dried stiff like parchment, with metallic gleams on the inner sides. The cuffs of his sleeves and the worn lapel of his coat were black with dried blood, and on the pony before him hung a larger skin, probably of a dog or calf.

Marmots abounded out on the wide plains, jumping up as one approached, like sudden dark clods come to life, to scurry towards their burrows, throwing up their hind-quarters in a comical way, because of their very short fore-legs. Arrived at their earths, they invariably stopped short and glanced towards the possible danger, giving vent to shrill warning whistles. To get a better view they would sit up like bolsters, with hanging fore-paws and curving claws. The Mongol would then halt, slide from his saddle, and advance from behind his pony like some strange creature on all-fours, the sun glinting on the skin he had thrown over his back. The little fellow was intrigued as he eyed this monster, and assumed different positions in his amazement, trying to ascertain what it could be – all the while emitting his warning whistle. He saw a dark rod with forked rest pushed forward by this approaching creature, seeking firm hold on the ground. One last moment the marmot hesitated, for he wanted to have something definite to tell his family. Alas, poor marmot! A sudden bang startled his ears as something hit his face with blinding force. Earth and sand squirted about him, while a large

nebulous form trailed towards him. Then he sank sideways on the ground near his burrow, and beat the air with his little paws in a last futile attempt to escape, while blood dropped from between his rodent teeth and oozed from his ears.

A quarter of an hour later, bereft of its skin, his blood-covered carcass and sharp little grimace was flung away, while the skin, stretched on sticks like a paper dragon, shook to and fro on the shanks of the pony as the Mongol hurried onward, his rifle slung once more across his shoulder.

Now the man had come back after several weeks of successful hunting. He brought his bag into the jurt, and began to examine the skins carefully. Then he spread them on the conical roof to dry in the sun. He was busy all day attending to this harvest of his trip. Suddenly towards evening he pauses, overcome by illness, and a couple of hours later is lying on the ground in a high fever of delirium. He sees marmots everywhere . . . more and more marmots. They hop about him like demons; whether he opens his eyes or shuts them, the same picture always holds his disordered brain. Two marmots, male and female, sit before their burrow, embrace each other with their short paws, and play a comical game, while an unnaturally hot sun pours down upon their furry bodies . . . a sun of delirium, both hot and cold . . . black, and yet blazing. The animals swell out to a gigantic size and dwindle again, to slip in and out of the little entrance of their burrow. At times their heads, freshly skinned, are red with blood, then blue like the skin of onions, as they grin with pointed incisor teeth. Drops of sweat rise on the moist, fresh skin, as it dries quickly into thin parchment . . . A painful cough racks the distended lungs of the sick man and the air seems to pierce them with stabs like needles, for the dark spectre of lung plague had entered this jurt, in which the dull-witted Mongols come and go attending to their

simple duties, helplessly unaware of danger. When the sun began to set, the woman removed the skins from the roof and brought them in, piling them carefully in a corner.

To the sick man in his raging fever the night seemed full of suns and of floating bodies of marmots hovering overhead and dancing round him. He threw himself restlessly from side to side, and muttered unintelligible words, wandering, he fancied, through space, free and unattached.

His wife sat cross-legged, facing the brown circle of unsteady light given by the flame of a little butter lamp burning before the household altar. Her heavy pock-marked face was like an unfinished lump of lifeless clay, without shadows, staring out stolidly between the beaded strings that hung in bunches from her golden headpiece. Her horsehair wig was parted and drawn behind the ears through flat staves into symmetrical curves, ending in a thick plait. Through the loose opening of her salmon-pink silk robe, and its lining of curly lamb's fleece, the hollow between her breasts showed like pale wax. All night she sat thus without moving, swinging her prayer-wheel and muttering '*Om mani padme hum*,' without ceasing.

Outside, the wide country stretched into the dark starlit silence of a wind-still night. A dog barked . . . a cow lowed . . . but the Mongol woman sat like a stone image face to face with the dread spectre in her jurt. Neither would give way. . . . At dawn she rose with stiffened knees and opened the door. A grey streak of light streamed towards her over the billows of the land, spreading westward, as the veils of darkness fell rapidly from the blue canopy overhead. A chord of light flushed in increasing strength across its silken dome, deepening into rosy tints, suffusing and blending more and more, until a sudden golden ray of warmth shot like a clarion note across the scene . . . the sun had come . . . and all the broad horizon awakened

to life! The golden roofs of the lamasery blazed forth like a row of flaming shields into the gradually warming light. Sounds came from the temple in wild chords and rushed into the distance, booming, growling, clashing, and jarring.

The woman fastened up her jacket, and with dragging steps went to the neighbouring jurts, rotating her prayer-wheel. Everywhere she told the same tale, leaning forward and putting her head through the door. Then she swung herself into the saddle and rode towards the monastery, the pony's rump gurgling and rumbling rhythmically to its trot, and the saddlery creaking as she dwindled into the distance, and became a moving dot in the sunny expanse, until lost to sight.

On the open places of the lama settlement, where mangy mongrels were sunning themselves after the cold night, she dismounted, and tied the pony's halter rope to one of the red posts that supported a curved roof over the entrance of the palisaded enclosure. Crossing the yard, she entered the jurt where the chief lama sat in the half light, robed in heavy lemon-coloured silk with a wide collar-band of dark velvet. He had pushed up the long sleeves like the folds of a concertina, so that his emaciated hands and part of his thin brown arms hung free on his wadded robe, which gleamed like liquid amber. It was surmounted by a curious head, furrowed by a thousand wrinkles and many deep lines, a squat nose, small and rather hooked, and a loose, flabby mouth with pale violet lips; there were no eyebrows over his small eyes, always brimming over with tears, in which the dull milky pupil showed transparently blue. His head was clean shaven and in pale contrast with the crinkled brown parchment of his face.

The Mongol woman fell on her knees, slid towards the seated lama, and pressed her face, framed in its widespread horns, to the hem of his robe. He took no notice, and the

beads of his rosary passed through his fingers without a pause, till after a while he reached across a little table near by, and rang a clear-voiced silver bell, bowing to three sides. After this he asked the woman whence she had come, phrasing each question as though he knew what had brought her, and the woman only answering such questions as were put to her. Truly an evil spirit had penetrated into her jurt, in spite of the butter lamp she kept carefully alight all night before the altar. After a few short questions the lama knew with whom he was dealing, while the woman crouched and crawled before him in search of a little comfort in her misery. The old priest remarks drily that mankind is guilty of many sins . . . each must do his best to pay for these, must trust the everlasting benevolence, and must be content with what help the grace of the gods gave, to conquer these sins. He clapped his hands, and a young, thick-set lama in a dirty red kirtle appeared, gave a searching glance at the woman, and crouched down respectfully near the door, awaiting the lama's instructions. He was informed that a demon had taken possession of the jurt of the noble-born, a demon . . . A sly expression glided over the younger man's face, while the old lama fingered his rosary, appeared to sink into meditation, and carefully overheard the conversation which began between the other two. Yes, the woman answered, the herds stood well, and had no sickness; yes, there were also a quantity of fine furs . . . A higher power had risen against this woman's husband. Why against him? No one could tell that. But this 'wherefore' influenced the woman's whole attitude. Calmly she came, and there were no tears now, no outburst of sentiment betrayed her feelings, for these were atrophied into unconscious subordination to a higher law, in a negative indestructible form of hope. But these red and yellow lamas are the instruments that are to weaken the evil of a constant remoulding of form, and of the

causes from which it springs; illness is only a process to which form is subordinated, and death is the final destruction of a form along the eternal line of renewal: therefore physical life is a formal manifestation only. This venerable lama sitting there, lost in exalted meditation with the gaze of his filmy eyes turned inwards, perceives the esoteric meaning of that 'wherefore' which destroys the body as soon as the 'cause' demands a new form, the old form falling away like ripened fruit. Every illness, each accident that breaks up the form, gradually or suddenly, is part of the evolution of this 'cause.' But the different angles of perspective from which the high lama and the ignorant woman viewed and incorporated this belief, which both shared, yielded a good field for traffic and barter; and the young lama was the practical or business agent for dispensing the wisdom of the elder one. Had the woman possessed this deeper perception, she would, of course, have submitted without question to the manner in which 'the cause' was justly expressing its purpose. But she was an immature lay creature, incapable as yet of gazing into the face of the highest truths, or of perceiving the inevitable laws of religion, and so she was obliged to approach them through an intermediary.

Years ago this Mongol woman had borne a child, and, doing all she could to guard her treasure, she surrounded her couch with lucky signs, and undertook most unsuitable pilgrimages during heavy pregnancy, collecting amulets against evil influence. One day virulent smallpox broke out in her jurt, and spread from one person to another. She lost no time in bringing her child to the first who had contracted the disease, and whose fevered face was a mass of open eruptions, blotting out his features. With her finger she took some of the secretion, and smeared it over the forehead of her child. Like the other children who had been thus deliberately brought into direct contact with the

illness, it sickened, yet all recovered except her child, and a week later she carried its small corpse on a sheepskin into the steppe to be exposed. This little form had been destroyed because it could not justify its 'cause.'

This would be regarded by the eyes of science as direct infection – but why did other children, similarly treated and equally infected, recover? Why did even he who first contracted this dread disease survive? Evidently nature was here bent on destroying the bodies that were not equal to her hard demands. Does this not signify a 'cause' that steps in with destruction of old forms, as soon as it needs renewal? The Mongol woman's faith was focussed on the many lucky objects with which she had surrounded her child, and so, in blind faith, she asked the lamas to exorcise and banish from her dwelling the demon which was bent on destruction.

The personification of a fierce demon in a human body, by a three-eyed ox's head with carnivorous teeth, and a thousand swinging arms; whose rosary consists of blood-shot eyeballs, his halo of human heads or skulls; or again of a mild god, sleek and lissom, and with blissful smile, are but symbols expressing in outward form the existence of both good and evil, and not personal beings. It is, in fact, the mere outworking or expression of formless tendencies that possess no actual body. Colours also become symbols – there are blue, red, and yellow demons. A dancing kaleidoscope of colours becomes the expression of mystic complications and tendencies, embodying attributes and symbols of things beyond words, in concepts of a purely spiritual state that exhaust themselves in fantastic forms.

That discordant sound of clashing notes coming from the temple was supposed to represent the pulsing blood-stream of life within the body, and an increased emphasis of sound is said to bring the body into harmony with its

immediate environment, and thus to deepen meditation into final absorption into the All.

. . . . .

As the sun crept upward through the crystal-clear air, a group of dirty red-coats dragged in heavy boots over the pale sand down the incline from the lamasery, and followed the tracks of the woman's white pony. Some carried over their shoulders the long stilts of their large round drums, and telescopic copper trumpets ringed with silver ornamentation. Others brought hollow shin-bones with round-headed joints wrapped in silk cloths, and large spiral conch shells, the size of a man's head, their rosy-lipped openings turned inwards; also skull drums with green leather stretched over two domes of skulls; and, wrapped in yellow cloth, a long book consisting of loose leaves held together by two wooden boards. Before her jurt the woman had dismounted, and hobbled the pony's forelegs with its halter rope. As soon as the lamas approached, she threw herself full length in the dust before the entrance of the hut, and each lama stepped over her and vanished stooping through the doorway. After that she rose and followed; and giving each a bowl of tea and placing a dish of meal cakes before them, she retired into a dark corner.

All this time the sick man had been lying in a whirl of delirium, with no sign of recognition in his wide-staring eyes. The lama with the book went to him, and crouched down near his head. Holding the book in both hands, he touched the sick man's forehead, and began to chant in a deep bass voice, pausing at the end of each sentence, and always ending on a deeper note, so that his speech was like the sound of loud sighing. Now and then he raised the book to touch the forehead of the sick man, whose limbs were shaking as with ague. The woman, crouching on crossed

PART OF A LAMA PROCESSION (CARRYING

legs, sank forward lower and lower until she lay with her face on the ground – an extraordinary position – showing that her acute misery had eliminated all other feeling. The other lamas held their musical instruments in readiness and conversed in whispers, while their glances searched and explored the dim interior of the jurt, indifferent to the tragedy that was taking place. In the pauses between the lama's incantations, while he was expanding his lungs like bellows to sigh out each new insistent phrase, a deep, mysterious silence pervaded the hut.

Outside, a blazing sun poured down in bright glaring radiance from a cloudless sky. A group of men, women, and children collected near by, staring reverently, for through the felt wall of the jurt they could hear the murmur of the lama's voice. Presently a deep, rolling sound began, as though a hundred fingers were beating upon drums with increasing force, swelling up to a few loud knocks of the fist. A second's pause . . . and then again the muffled swell of the drum. It was like the rushing and soughing of the wind in the tree-tops on the Bogdo-Ool stretched in the full glare of the midday sun. Then the conch, pressed to lips between inflated cheeks, gave voice, interrupted by continuous groaning from a wooden clarinet, and the wailing and whining of wind blown through hollow shin-bones, while grunts came from the long copper tubes of the trumpets. A sudden clash of cymbals! The jurt was full of throbbing from all these strange sounds. After the lama had persistently exhorted the sick man to tear himself from the unreality of his delirious fantasies, and to behold only the clear liberating light dwelling behind all appearances, to throw off fear, to rise above madness, with the whole power of his will at the highest tension of meditation, he ceased, and the music fell in, gathering up into a loud and discordant cacophony all this tension caused within the human body by the circulating of fevered

blood, and enforcing concentration, as it were, from without. But the strong purpose of nature persisted, bent on its destruction of form. The sick man tossed from side to side; his eyes wandered like wheels spinning loose; his breast heaved and gasped. The lama, heated by his constant repetitions, let his book rest for many moments at a time on the fevered brow, and he now almost lay with his lips to the ear of the sick man, barking out his words:

'Lo! In the midst of naught the flame of fire springs up and circles . . . the body kindled by its own tension . . .

O thou noble-born! Behold the flame of fire!

Feel how thy body originated in this flame . . .

Air forms over the points of its tongues . . .

Lo! Thy body grows . . . the heated air turns to water that falls into the fire . . . that forms the ashes into clay . . . which encrust the fire . . .

O noble-born, thus wert thou made . . . and born from the mingling of elements . . . sprung from self-kindled original force.

O thou of noble birth, come forth from the realm of passions that begot thy physical frame. Come forth! Come forth! Come forth!

Swing upwards and contemplate thyself and thine actions. . . . So shall come liberation. Come forth from thy body, as from a garment and say :

"*Here lies my shell of fire, air, earth and water.*"'

Fire awakens in thee desire to live – drives thee to enjoyment. Come forth from the flame and give birth to all-knowing wisdom . . . the boundless light that enables thee to see and know all separately and . . . Lo! All together!'

Air awakens in thee the breath of life that is driven by envy and jealousy . . . the will to live and to experience.

Come forth! and become the "all-powerful conqueror." Acquire unfailing knowledge, in all things pertaining to wisdom.

Water awakens thy life stream . . . blood circulates through the shell of thy body, with anger and clouded consciousness – Tear the veil and come forth! Become as a mirror reflecting pure wisdom.

Lo! Attain divine, heroic, all-conquering consciousness.

Earth gave thee the form of thy body. The passion of selfhood in form . . . with pain that constantly rends thee – the way of suffering without end. Come forth! Come forth! Lo! Extinguish the flame! Lift thyself above it! Without the flame there is neither air, nor water, nor earth.

O thou noble-born, step forth into freedom, unfettered by actions and deeds of the body . . . having gained liberation through experiencing them.

Gather up and condense the power of thy will to lift thee above thy shell . . . wield all the weapons of thy will . . . only these . . . against the demon of form!

Come forth, and say: "*Here lies my garment!*" Say: "*Here stands the house from which I came forth.*" Thy hands hold the lightning which can destroy it.'

The lama makes the symbolic gesture of handing his sceptre (the *dorje* or thunderbolt: four bronze rings welded together). The incense stick has glowed to its end and its ashes lie like a slender broken reed on the ground. Suddenly a dead silence prevails, broken only by the muffled groans of the sick man. With the dying glimmer of the joss-stick the time is over for exorcism, for trying to raise the patient above his suffering and liberating him from his pains by exhortations. The lamas silently prepare to leave; taking up their instruments they stoop and go through the doorway. Once outside they shoulder their drums and depart in a

leisurely group. The people stand gazing in through the door and then disperse. One of them kills a sheep, draws a silken scarf through the cut in its throat, and hangs it dripping over the entrance of the sick man's jurt.

A few hundred yards from the jurt, the retiring lamas came upon two elderly ones approaching, fingering their rosaries, and followed by two boys in shoes much too large and wrapped in torn coats also much too large, obviously the cast-off garments of the older men. They carried a drum and a book wrapped in a yellow cloth. After a lengthy conversation between the leaders of each group, while they offered each other their flasks of snuff, they separated again, the new group proceeding to the jurt, the other returning to the lamasery. Before the entrance of her jurt the Mongol woman greeted the two lamas, bending her forehead to touch the book, and letting them step over her body into the jurt.

A glance convinced the lamas that the patient was dying. His tongue protruded from tightly clenched jaws, and the pupils of his eyes were turned back and invisible. They held a metal mirror to his lips, and, behold, it was hardly clouded. Hurriedly one of the lamas seated himself near the head of the dying man, and described magic circles with his hands, bringing them down for a second or two on the cold brow and passing them along the veins of the sufferer's neck with a gentle, circling pressure. While thus occupied, the lama intoned certain mantras in the same singing, sobbing, sighing way as his predecessor, swaying his body slowly to and fro in rhythm with the movements of his hands. The other lama sent the woman out of the hut, as her lamentations might hinder the departing soul, to which every help must now be given, to sever all earthly ties – and to prevent the desire of return to this world. The lama at the dying man's head continued his stroking movements, bent, it would seem, on regulating the circulation with

his agile fingers in a strange symbolism of gesture, drawing a line up the neck and over the temples, and from the eyebrows sideways to the ear with the soft dexterity of a cat. A convulsive wave ran along the body, its head bent backwards, its joints cracked and stretched, and then gradually grew limp – it had been deserted by life. Outside the entrance the woman lay prone with her face in the dust.

The other lama had made a horoscope from the death symptoms, to guide the ceremonies that were to follow. They decreed the immediate removal of the corpse for exposure. The lama ceremoniously presented a pale blue silk veil to the dead man, and then tied his face up in it. The body was next divested of its clothes, and carried by a couple of villagers on a piece of felt out into the steppe some distance away, and there laid on the ground. Dogs soon scented out the track, and overhead a few dark points began to circle in wide and narrowing spirals. Thus ended the marmot-hunting trip of one of the men – a victim to plague!

Wherever the human frame proved an insufficient expression for the developing 'cause,' this spectre was sent into a jurt to destroy the form – so they believed. Old people and children, women and men then fell as when an autumn gale shakes the withered foliage from the tree, and breaks off unsound branches. There were no means of mitigating or limiting its fury. Everyone was exposed to the decrees of nature's destructive force, which would only rest when it should have completed its task. These epidemics were held to be one of the cleansing processes which repeat themselves continually as long as the world is left to the devices of nature. This recognition, and the endeavour to get beyond its influence, is considered the true victory of mankind – his inner liberation; but when a man searches for outer means whereby to quell the fury of such a storm,

and to defend himself against its purpose, he begins at once to estrange himself from the course of the divine intention.

. . . . .

The ceremonies connected with the death of the marmot-hunter, however, were by no means yet at an end. The corpse was carried out to be exposed on the steppe as soon as possible, because of the infection. The horoscope described this as being done to avoid the interference of a bad demon by stepping into the substance not yet freed from its material fetters. Certain ceremonies had to be observed after the death of an 'ignorant one,' not necessary at the death of one more fully illuminated.

As soon as the two lamas brought back news of the death to the temple, two choirs of priests were told off to chant alternately throughout the day and night, for the benefit of the spirit of the departed one, in a small temple indicated by the horoscope as suitable for the purpose. The morning after this had been concluded a lama opened the jurt which had been kept closed and sealed since the death. During the following service the widow did not appear. She lay in a neighbour's jurt, apathetic and lost to the world, like some wounded animal. Her wig with its jewelled and horned cap lay beside her limp body, huddled up in its crumpled, fur-lined silken robe, a covering drawn over her head and tear-stained face. She lay there for a day and a night without moving, while the lama prepared her jurt for his next task. He took a carpet, rolled it up, and stood it on end. On this he hung the clothes of the departed, placing his boots below the hem. In the place of a head he fastened a square piece of paper, bearing a printed woodcut of a crouching figure surrounded by various symbols and a Tibetan prayer-text. Before this strange effigy he placed the man's saddle, pipe, and tobacco pouch, and a few other

AN EXORCIST LAMA OF MONGOLIA

objects of his daily use, while from the monastery the tubas brayed and the metallic clash of brazen cymbals sounded, where two rows of lamas sat opposite to each other, swaying their bodies backwards and forwards to a sombre chant.

In slow and weighty verses the lama in the jurt addressed these garments before him:

'I, the spirit of him who has left the world, say:
"May the great benignant One grant me his shining mercy.
May he pardon me my sins that continually reattach me to the wheel of life.
There is no one present to lament the end of my life –
I only grasp the hand of my lama, leading me on to the safe path that breaks through all thought-forms which mirror my past.
They are untrue and I pass through them easily,
Being spirit, above all thoughts." '

The lama chants the words from the narrow strips of the Tibetan text. He expounds the appearances that will confront the soul on its present wanderings, and becomes more and more insistent in his exhortation to calmness:

'Lo! It is but the material residue thy spirit has yet to put away, that which gives thy thoughts these forms.
Be not dazzled by them – raise thyself above them –
And let them flow past thee, knowing them to be unreal.
Be to thyself like a mother comforting her frightened child at midnight: "*It is but the wind, only a passing light, and tomorrow the sun will shine again.*" '

All this takes place in the dead man's jurt, while his clothes hang lifelessly from an upturned roll of carpet, with the toes of his boots looking aimlessly out from under the skirts of his robe, and the square piece of paper over the collar staring as blankly while being addressed by the lama as if it were a human face.

Day after day the lama returned. The pile of inscribed leaves yet to be read growing lower, as the opposite pile grew

higher. Every day the descriptions of the phantoms the departed one encounters grow more fear-inspiring and monstrous – the behest for calm more insistent and comforting: 'Wander past this form . . . it is such and such a thought-form out of thy past life . . . wander past . . . say: "*I have no fear, I perceive thou art not real.*" Be not horrified by such forms and scenes – do not lose consciousness of thy higher self in the presence of such phantoms as now assail thee . . . Say: "*They are dream bubbles (like the dreams I had about things done during the day) returning now that I have stepped out of the body – reflecting all my actions – gaining the greater strength and clarity, the closer my life was connected with them* –" Be not dazzled by them, or thou wilt be reborn in their regions, in a body that would be but a reaction to the thought-forms to which thou hast succumbed. Try not to flee from them in horror – experience the dream, conscious that thou art dreaming.'

Another day begins, and the lama returns to help the spirit in its wanderings:

'O thou noble-born, meditate on the words of wisdom I pronounce. Thou hast passed beyond all appearance, and hast said: "*Ye are not real,*" – hast confronted them fearlessly however terrifying they appear. Recognize the appearances, but feel that thou art safe and anchored in thy higher consciousness. Neither the six-armed blood-red god, nor the horse-headed king is real; neither the bony rattle of his skulls, nor the bottomless abyss into which he would try to cast thee. Seek not to escape – have no fear – and all will vanish. Hasten – do not linger – realize that thy time is shortening – be certain that victory carries thee forward to the goal of all wisdom – where is neither form nor space.'

When all the exhortations to the spirit of the dead man are over, the door is opened, and all passing Mongols are given a free meal. Part of the food is placed before the

effigy in bowls, and then the meal is cast abroad, and a bunch of mangy dogs, attracted by the smell of food, falls greedily upon it. The paper that represented the face is now burnt over a butter lamp. The lama rolls the clothes, boots, and cap into a bundle, and carries them off to the monastery. The next day they hang for sale in a wooden shed at the bazaar. Mongols come and go, lift them up, examine their condition, and bargain for hours. Lamas lounging about the bazaar are appealed to by the buyers, and indolently approach, fingering their rosaries. A curious valuation takes place if the dealer and the buyer cannot agree. Within the shed the buyer shoves his right hand under the lama's long hanging sleeve, and presses the hand of the lama, while for a few moments the two men gaze fixedly into each other's eyes and name a sum, the dealer taking no notice whatever. Such groups can be seen in various parts of the bazaar standing together and calling out a price. I was told that if the price named on both sides agrees, the bargain is clinched at once, even if it means a loss to the dealer, and he invariably hands over the article smilingly.

Out on the open steppe the corpse of the dead Mongol lay stiff on its piece of felt, its waxen face tied up in the pale blue scarf. For days the dogs circled round without touching the body, yet each morning as the sun rose over the wide horizon and began to warm the air, the body seemed to have altered its position, as though its limbs had moved during the night. Eagles sliding down through the air, swept to earth with widespread wings, and sat about as though they formed a death watch. One morning the body lay on its face, the arms propped on the ground, and the knees drawn up, a large dark hole gaping in its side. The first attack! Wolves had come overnight and had gnawed at it till early dawn. After this the dogs worried it all day, leaving a few lumps of flesh adhering to bare bones, like

clay on the supports of a figure to be modelled. Soon all was dispersed except the skull, which, with remnants of dry skin in the eyeholes, was left bleaching blue and brown, and grinning with its ivory teeth as it rolled about in the sand and grass and stones. The felt dropped to pieces, the wooden stave with the prayer-strip drooped aslant, till blown over by the wind. The amulet lay forsaken between the stones, a little linen packet, oily and sweat-begrimed, attached to a stiff cord. It contained prayers, bits of stone of the Bogdo-Ool, and probably some dust which the Hutuktu's foot has touched.

Once more in the distant temple throbbing heart-beats sounded out into the air, following the wanderings of this soul – after which all was over, every tie had been severed, under this tepid trembling blue sky interwoven with white sunbeams, varying from cool to warm, from hot to cold. Over the steppes each new morning arises clean and crystal-clear, banishing the dreams of night to melt away like shadows behind the undulating horizon.

. . . . .

An old feud broke out afresh in the neighbourhood. Two Mongolian women fought over a child, each declaring it to be hers. The women were both widows, their statements tallied exactly as to the date and hour of birth, and the child seemed to acknowledge both mothers! The thicker the dust raised by the quarrel, the more the whole occurrence gripped the superstitious minds of the neighbours, who believed firmly in a miracle. Lamas came and went, while the child grew and thrived, and was seen with either of the women, while the other followed, turning her prayer-wheel, and complaining to high heaven in jealous lament . . . the Mongols accepting the mystery with prayerful faith.

EXPOSED CORPSE OF A MONGOL

It seems that both women had been taken with the pangs of childbirth at the same time, a rather curious coincidence in a small community where there are but few children. This, moreover, occurred in two jurts standing close together. One of the women may have had a miscarriage or a false birth, resulting from suggestion, to which the Asiatic mentality is very liable, for in the state of matriarchy found in some of these regions, the birth-pangs of the mother are shared by the father! In this particular case, the desire of the one woman may have induced auto-suggestion in the other.

The Mongolian race is not prolific, and for some time has neither increased nor decreased. Large families, as in China, are rare in this country, and many couples to their sorrow remain childless. Boys are said to be more numerous than girls, hence possibly the celibacy of the priests, though by some this is counted as one of the factors for the dying-out of the race. Owing to the minority of women, cases of polyandry (somewhat similar to Tibet) are not rare, though these do not alter the birthrate. Laziness and want are inherent characteristics in these nomadic races. Where there is an attempt at cultivation of the soil, it is invariably done by the Chinese and not by indigenous effort. This total lack of enterprise, or whatever we may call it, no doubt is due to some underlying cause. Other means by which nature maintains the balance are the sex-diseases prevalent from time immemorial. Sterility, and a short span of life in conditions where only the fit can survive, are consequences of this disease. Being a legacy dating back many centuries, the symptoms of the disease have become less violent, counterbalanced by a natural process of resistance. Skin diseases are an inevitable result in Mongolia, though not in Europe, and in Mongolia I have never known it to result in paralytic seizures, though 99 per cent. are said to be suffering from scrofulous symptoms.

Mongols seem to throw off a good deal of the poison through eruptions of the skin. Once nature can throw off the poison, a healing process sets in, a healthy balance is found, and the mentality is rarely affected.

Great importance is attached to one's mental observation during death, of the dissolution of one's own form; to which is added a further 'supermental' or 'superconscious' observation of the soul condition of one whose thought-forms, when freed, still reflect bodily conditions. That stroking manipulation undertaken by the lama at the moment of death was meant to guide the circulation towards the brain up to the last, so as to keep the consciousness awake as the soul passes the portals of death. The brain is the chief centre, and it is considered most undesirable for the soul to depart through any other part of the body, such as the stomach, which would indicate that it was ruled by fleshly tendencies, instead of rising above them. The horoscope of the dying man is based on symptoms, carefully observed, which are used to determine what further ceremonies are needed. This higher knowledge is carefully guarded, much of it is never written down, and is transmitted orally to the elect, who, I was able to observe, have a very different understanding and interpretation to that of the average lamas, who are incapable of a deeper comprehension.

. . . . .

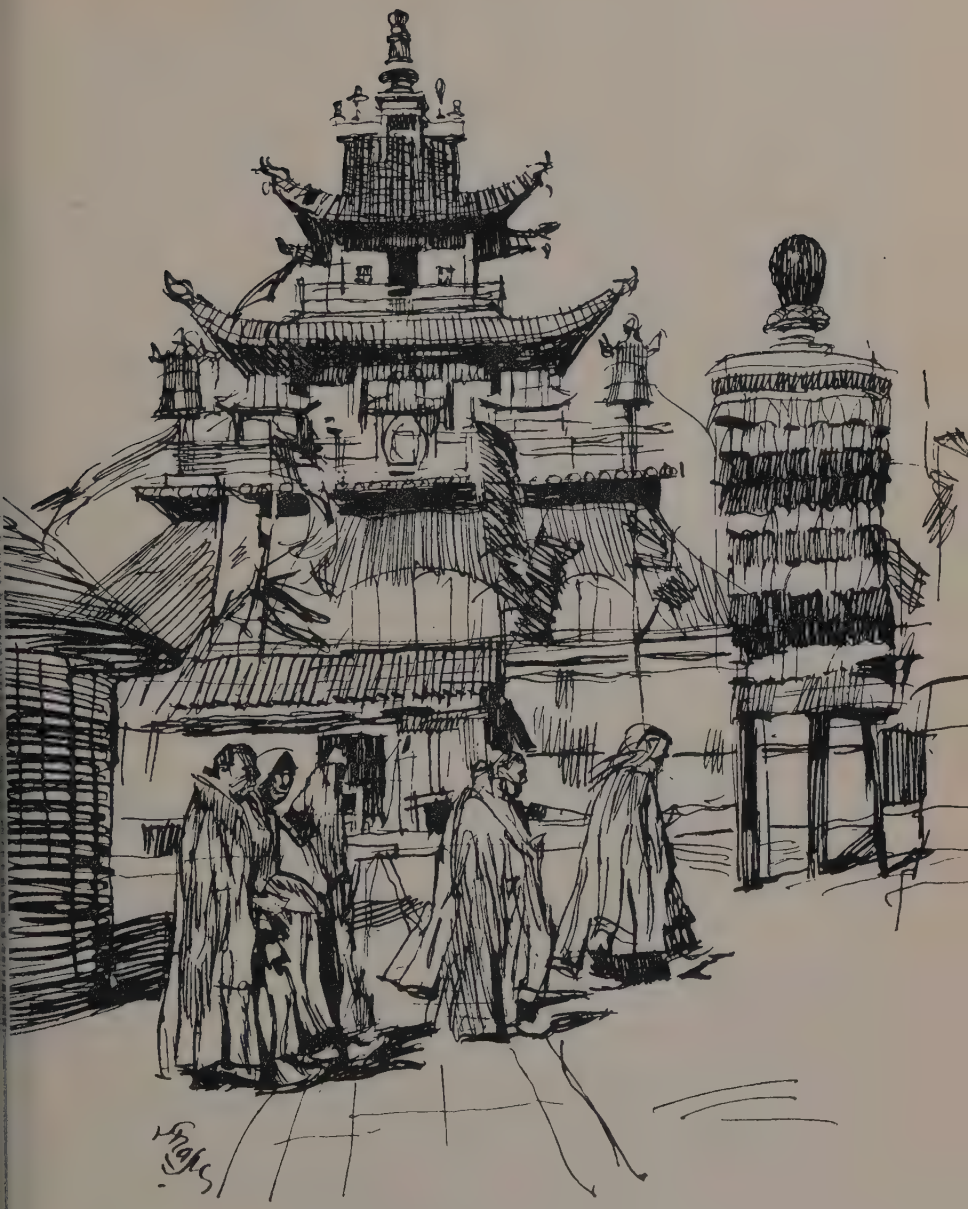
After a spring of sunny days, with a cloudless sky spread serenely above the volumes of dust that were whirled up by every movement, a hot, dry summer followed. Here and there a few white clouds would gather on the blue void of the sky, only to disperse under the vibrating heat of noon. In front of the wooden sheds of the bazaar, there was always a gathering of Mongols in a medley of gay colours. Each time a sudden whirlwind raised a pillar of dust and

sand, they hid their faces in their curved elbows. Then gradually the monsoon began to gather clouds into great banks, stretching in flat layers to the distant horizon. A forest fire had broken out on the ridge of the Bogdo-Ool. Thick black smoke mounted lazily into the sultry atmosphere with occasional tongues of flame showing here and there, accompanied by a loud cracking and banging of burning wood. All eyes were directed towards this ridge, and to the blue-black clouds gathering silently, and sinking ever lower over the country, which lay like glowing brickwork radiating heat into a confined space. At last the horizon began to be blotted out here and there by pale grey strips suspended from the melting clouds, and the market-place quickly cleared, those who had ponies making hastily away through the network of narrow lanes. Soon a few heavy drops fell into the dust, followed by a rushing downpour of watery threads. The parched ground drank in the cooling rain gratefully, which soon quenched the fire on the ridge of the Bogdo-Ool. By the evening the clouds broke up into pale exhausted shreds, and twilight fell over the satisfied earth. A little smoke still rose from some charred stumps on the ridge of the hill, but the sultry heat and drought were over, the ground well nourished, and broad puddles of repletion left standing about. The burnt grass on the slopes soon put on a film of green, which increased daily. The nights grew colder, and the sky was usually covered by discharging clouds all sliding steadily to the north-east.

. . . . .

A large scaffolding was being erected on the wide space in front of the Sharsum Monastery, and all the place was in a feverish excitement that culminated in the Zam festival. Large blue tents were erected round the place in symmetrical order, making Urga look more like a revolving

kaleidoscope than ever. The people, in their feast-day clothes, were a moving mass of colours under the clear autumn sunlight. Musical instruments brayed wildly all the morning; wherever one stood the air seemed to throb with the din. By midday the crowd was surging toward the place in front of the monastery from all directions, passing the rows of prayer-wheels under little wooden roofs, and keeping the octagonal drums singing and groaning under strong thrusts and pushes. As these drums rotated, their flat discs gleamed beneath the red sunbeams. The Buddha's eightfold emblems of glory, gaily painted on the discs, turned in constant repetition: the six-spoked wheel of the law, the conch, the two golden fishes, the diagram of bliss, the lotus, the canopy, the vase, the bugle of triumph, and under each in flaming gold letters, the sacred syllables, '*Om mani padme hum*,' twice repeated. There were slanting praying-boards on which the people threw themselves flat on their stomachs dozens of times, before they proceeded to the centre of the feast. Within the tents rows of lamas stood in full dress. And in front sat others clad in dark red, with elongated trumpets resting on wooden stools, like cannons emitting sound. The crowd, ever increasing, surged round like a moving rainbow on a waterfall. Two men could be seen mounted on one pony and clinging to each other, people on foot talking and laughing, children on the shoulders of men and women. All the wonderful pomp of Mongolia lay spread out in the sun in a blaze of colours impossible to describe, running up and down a full scale of orgiastic notes in gleaming silks – salmon pink, milky green, and pale blue; stiff gold brocades all patterned in brown and emerald green; rows of red lamas like the crimson flesh of a pomegranate; others in robes of citron and amber – with blue cuffs and black velvet hems that curved about the neck and breast like a note of interrogation; helmet-shaped hats in citron and saffron with black brims turned



SHARSUM-TEMPLE AT URGA

high and trimmed with blue bows; caps of clipped woolly fur; clean-shaven heads of priests like pale tulips.

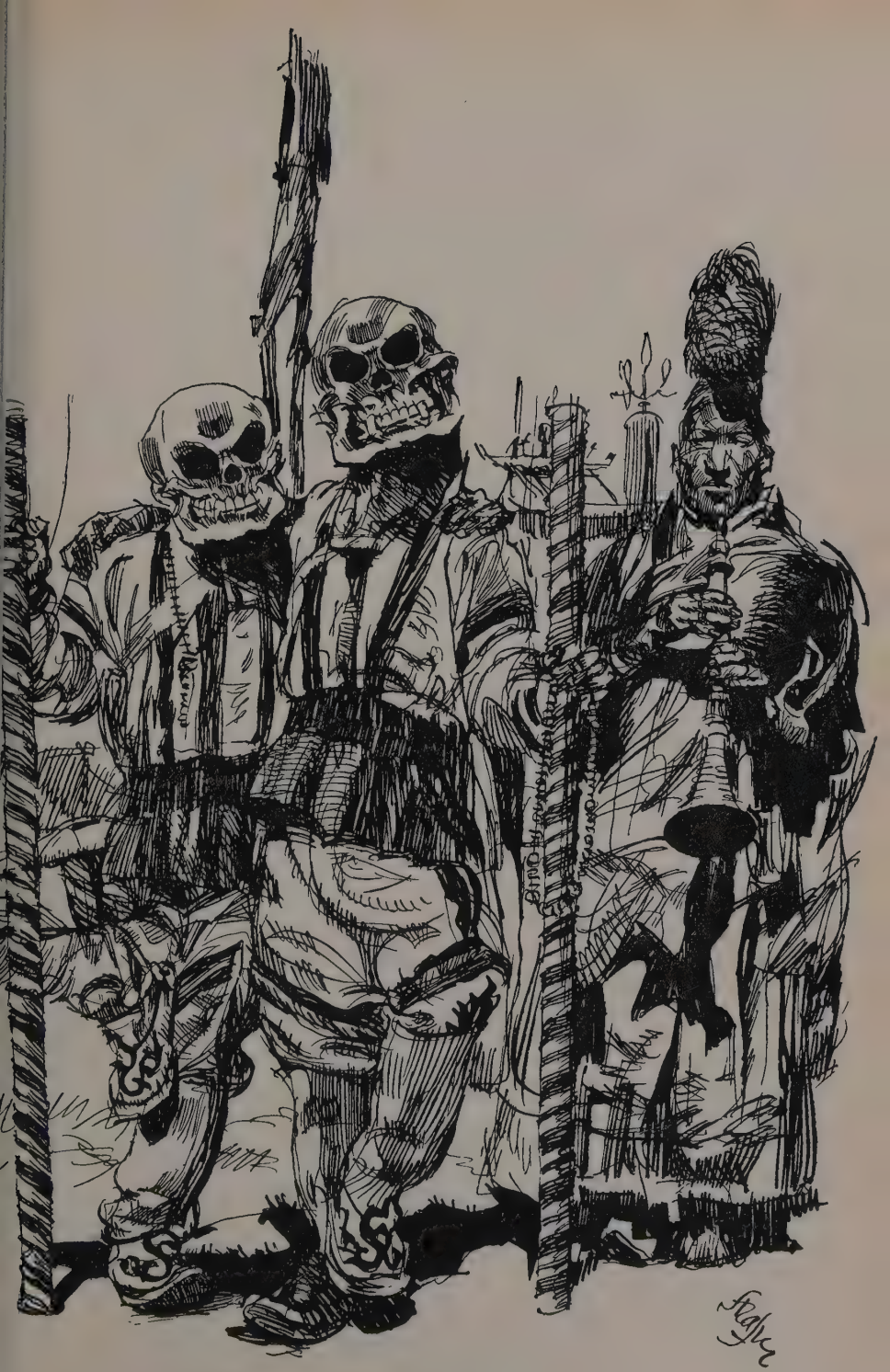
Across the ribs of the scaffolding three sacred pictures were stretched in full gigantic proportions with a row of coloured standards set up in front, their broad triangular points catching the light. Tent-awnings of dark blue, bound with white, rose and sank in the breeze. Near these great standards, held aloft by the red shafts of massive poles thrust into the ground, the various masks stood grinning, monstrous and terrifying under the friendly sunlight. There stood Erlik-Kan, the king of Oger, a mighty judge of the sacrifice he slew. He had an ox's head with bulging eyes of wrathful blue. The points of his horns, ending in a sharp-toothed edge of gold, could with one thrust tear soft flesh into an unrecognizable mass. He had widespread ears and inflated red nostrils. On his forehead he bore a crown of five skulls, and on his breast hung the silver discs of a metal mirror in white, pink and yellow. His silken robes and embroidered aprons hung to the ankles, showing feet in heavy reddish-brown felt boots with very thick white soles. This fierce demon, Erlik-Kan, would suddenly run amuck amongst the people in blind fury, threatening to depopulate the country in his insatiable lust for blood. Once, long ago, I was told he had been a holy anchorite dwelling in a cave, meditating on his way towards Nirvana. An hour before the completion of his fifteen years of isolation, two robbers entered his cave, and there beheaded a stolen ox. When they became aware of the hermit, and realized that he had seen the deed, they fell upon him. He pleaded that there was only one last hour of meditation needed for him to be removed from this world for ever, whereas if killed before the end he would lose the reward of his fifty years' training. But the robbers showed no mercy, and with one strong blow cut off his head and sent it rolling into the dust. The headless body

rose up at once, grasped the head that was nearest, which happened to be that of the ox, and put it on its shoulders. Then it slew the robbers, and scooping up the blood in their skulls, drank it, and from that day it became a fierce demon, stamping about from one foot to the other, to the braying clashes of trumpets, and gyrating in evil-boding circles that made the long sacks of his sleeves swing wide as he tossed his monstrous head at the breathless crowd, making the children scream and cling to their parents in shrill terror.

His excitement spread to the Drag-gsat, the eight fear-inspiring 'protectors of the law' who turned their mad masks to all sides, flourishing and crossing their *purbus* (magic daggers) and their knives. Long ago when Padma Sambawa came to the Tibetan desert as guest of the King Detsan, to make war against the demons, he destroyed all except the 'eight terrible ones,' who promised to become defenders of the law. This feast of demons was now in full swing to the blast of trumpets and wooden clarinets with the roll of drums swirling over the piously watching crowd.

Erlik-Kan's servants, the Boubhas, swung their grey heads, horned with wooden antlers, while their white robes gleamed, with scarves of yellow, blue and crimson fluttering like flames about them. Two white-clad, skull-headed spectres of the dead (Todskam) stalked about slowly, putting one foot carefully before the other as though they were blind. These strange figures all danced round in a circle to the rhythm of trumpets and drums. Then the exorcists joined the dancing circle. They wore broad-brimmed black hats, yellow and blue-striped silk robes, and were hung about with chains of beads that dangled and swung as they swayed their bodies to their regulated stamping in slow rotation in a planetary dance. Round the bulb-shaped crowns of their hats triangles of flaming

ERLIK-KAN, THE KING OF OGER (MASK OF THE RAM FESTIVAL)



TODSKAM MASKS AT THE ZAM FESTIVAL

leaves were fixed. Red lamas, with bunches of blue and pink veils floating about them, also joined and swung into the dancing circle.

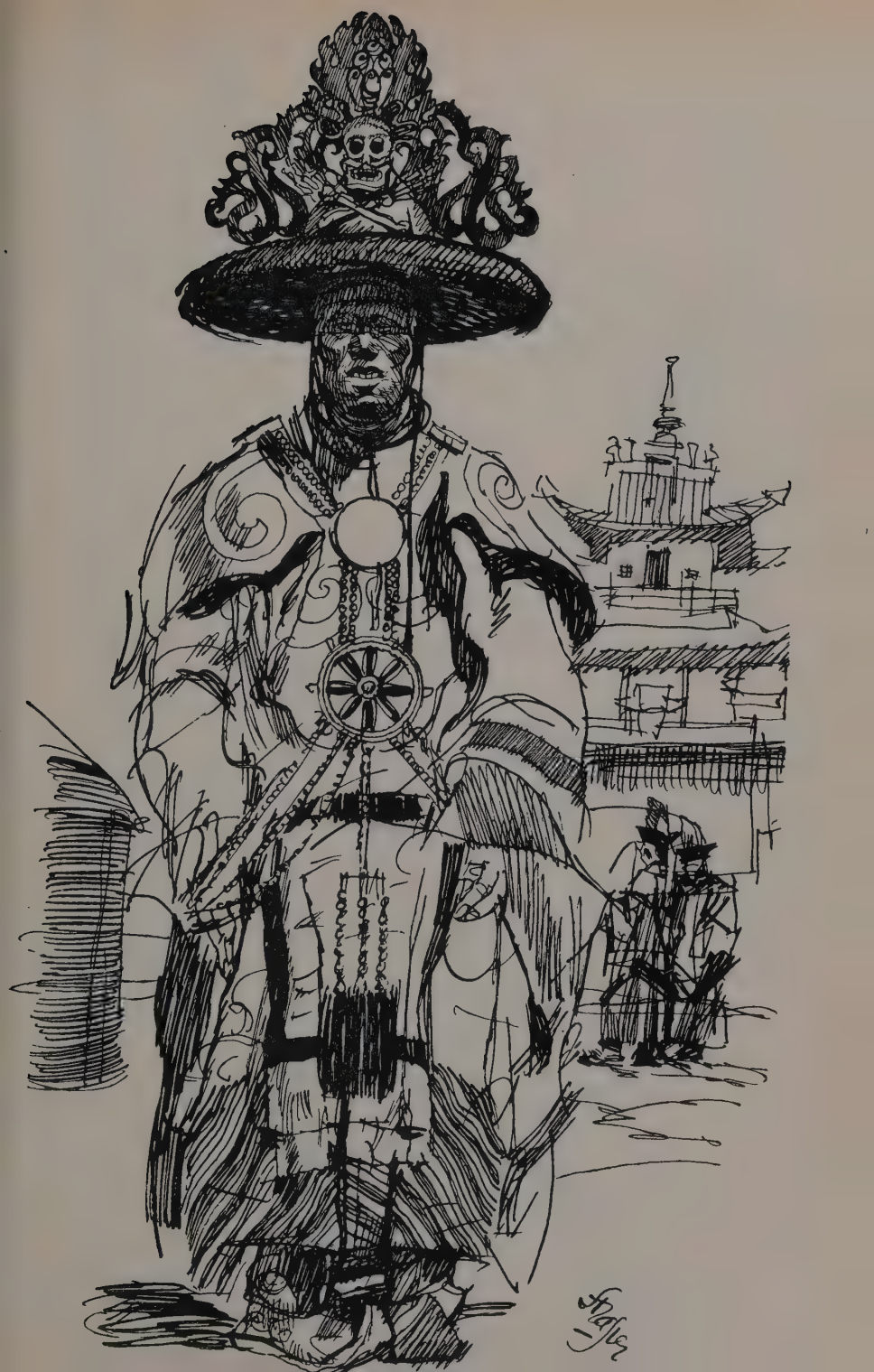
Gradually the demons slowed down and stood still, while the souls of the dead were rescued by the exorcists and won back from the fangs of the monsters which had triumphantly pounced upon them as they danced, clawing their victims into the circle of slow perdition. The 'Spirit of the Earth' the while moved amongst the crowd, to their great amusement, throwing nuts about and greeting all with good-natured banter. He was an old Methuselah with a long white beard and bushy eyebrows under a violently domed bald head. Gradually his happy good humour subsided, vanquished by the tragedy of life as he watched the demons approaching and circling round their victims. Siddha the teacher in a large floral robe, with heavy earrings dangling on each side of his ridiculous face, tried to mimic their movements, but failed to raise any laughter in the curious tension which now spread, as the special moment of blood and soul-curdling climax approached, with the joining in of the 'black-hats' who were waltzing themselves into a delirium. I was told that this dance was preceded by a day of strenuous meditation for all the masked figures, and in the eyes of several of the lamas I saw a peculiar gleam of fanaticism. The music lashed up the excitement, and the usually peaceful crowd was tense and past joking. Over all this the setting sun sent its last red rays, illuminating the ridge of the Bogdo-Ool and, catching the tridents of the standards, made them blaze like fire.

After this the feast began to subside, the place filling more and more with red and yellow lamas, and the masks vanishing behind the ring of spectators. Then trumpets heralded the approach of a procession from the palisaded courts of the Sharsum Temple, just as its double-tiered golden roof flashed like a sea of flame against the green tints of the

evening sky. The temple orchestra filed slowly out of the entrance towards this open space, preceded by two elongated trombones resting each on poles carried by boys in clothes much too large for them. Two lamas blew into these with inflated cheeks. Boys carrying long stilted drums propped on their hips followed, on which with swinging canes two lamas beat the rhythm to which they all moved. Clarinets wailed and miauled, cymbals clashed and shivered together.

Then a canopy with seven different-coloured frills swayed and tilted along. Under this an old lama walked in great dignity, with many gold-edged scarves floating about him. His wrinkled face was crowned by a yellow silk hat, sickle-shaped, with broad uptilted brim that gaped open in two points at the back, from between which blue silk scarves were brought over his shoulders and hung down in front. In his hands he held a silver vessel with curved neck, and a whisk of brilliant peacock's feathers. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and massive, and this impression was enhanced by his small head and huge hat. His long vestures swept the ground, raising swirls of dust. How great was the dignity wrapped in all these trappings, which were the natural expression of his personality! He inspired the deepest veneration, because he was no mere puppet finely decked for the occasion. I thought of our European processions, of men clad in the costumes of a past day, with faces and gestures of the twentieth century, quite out of keeping with the spirit of the robes, a mere theatrical attitude of ceremonial. But here the very wrinkles of the old face, the gestures and movements, harmonized with the robes that clothed this soul, that were the natural expression of his faith and carried the marks of daily life and usage.

The crowd surged forward with bowed heads as the aged lama blessed them in all directions with his whisk of feathers dipped in the vessel. Some threw themselves with their



THE OLD LAMA PATRIARCH

faces to the ground, others pressed their clenched hands, wound about with rosaries, to their breasts under bared heads, while their hats hung down behind from long knotted ribbons, or from their arms; others again held their children aloft. The lips of the old lama moved in unspoken words, as his hand swung the whisk in blessing. In the midst of this crowd, bent low or lying prone, the procession halted. The venerable lama crouched on the ground, still dispersing blessings, while several of the accompanying lamas held his robes out like a tent about him, and the canopy wobbled as His Holiness paused, and in obedience to a call of nature let a stream flow from under him, which wound its way in the sand, while he dipped and swung the gleaming whisk without ceasing in pompous blessing on the crowd lying with their faces in the dust.

Then the procession proceeded, the crowd rose and surged around, the music grew fainter and fainter, and the canopy swayed its seven frills as it wobbled away.

PART III

SANBAN'S REALM

Dark clouds, heavy with unshed rain, hung over the cauldron-shaped valley of Kalgan, and from the streets of the town white dust rose like spirals of incense towards the high altars of gods hidden behind the over-full paunches of the clouds above. Like swarming ants the Chinese threaded their ways in unending procession through these streets, urged as it were by the continuous clang of bells, sounded by rickshaw coolies in blue linen, that zigzagged shouting through the crowd. The sweating semi-clad bodies of load-coolies shone like yellow wax under the wide brims of sun-bleached straw hats as they ran, the pole across their shoulders with its swaying loads, creaking like new harness. In these rickshaws sat moon-faced Chinese in dark goggles wearing black silk jackets and dome-shaped caps. Along the open shops Chinese housewives and girls, uniformly clad in blue jackets over black trousers tied closely round their white-socked ankles, stilted their way on pointed little goats' feet. Mule-drawn carts on tall wheels, closely spoked and iron-tired, jolted and rumbled through the crowd, driven by Chinese soldiers in dusty grey, with black cloth shoes, and armed with the inevitable Mauser pistols in their wooden cases. Over all this jostling crowd the stagnant air hung thick with a sickening stench of sweat, or was it bruised garlic mixed with rancid fat?

Feng Yu-hsiang, the Christian general, lay with his

CHINESE WOMEN

army like a swarm of locusts in the harvest fields between Kalgan and Peking. His troops were at that time fairly under discipline; they were being taught to read and write, and had to attend Mass in the Mission Church of the French sisters. At the gates of this general's headquarters sentries stood on guard, cross-belted with well-filled bandoliers, and carrying heavy Mauser pistols with red tassels at each hip. They held broad-bladed swords with that smooth curve best suited for shaving off human heads, and these swords were bound round with blue cloth, the thin iron handle at the end forming a ring. The guards walked up and down before their shaky sentry-boxes, on a narrow path trodden smooth over broken maize crops. At the other end of this mutilated field ran the steely blue lines of the railway from Peking; and beyond an embankment a cluster of houses, with curved and tilted roofs, lay like diluvial litter heaped along the dry river bed. White wisps of dust hovered over this prospect in the overheated atmosphere, as I pursued my way to the General's camp.

When I showed my passport to the sentinel, he deposited his beheading instrument against the wall, and grasping my hand, shook it with Christian cordiality. In a long, mud-coloured building within, Feng Yu-hsiang and several of his officers sat, looking like a group of good Chinese burghers wearing dark goggles. His followers wore black waistcoats over grey linen skirts, and black cloth shoes with white felt soles; but the General's full, massive body was wrapped in a coarse blue peasant shirt, over which his shaven moon-shaped head towered with the air of a placid oily idol. Behind him a little Pekinese dog sniffed and yapped as I entered; this was Feng Yu-hsiang's battle-hound. He stooped and lifted it on to his lap, and then questioned me about my journey and said a few conventional things, staring often in silence straight before him, while his fingers ran through the silky hair of his little dog.

Then he addressed a few abrupt sentences to the interpreter who, when I crossed my legs as I sat, shot a furious glance at me. After that Feng took up the little bowl of tea; and, Chinese etiquette requiring my withdrawal, I rose and took my leave. One after the other each of those present rose and bowed politely, the battle-hound barked, and the interview was over. I seemed to have faced a Chinese wall of uncanny impersonal reserve in this quiet peasant who had taken up soldiering – the once most despised occupation in China. Western ideas were slowly poisoning the Eastern mentality, destroying its original conservatism.

I walked back over the trampled maize-field, crossed the rails and was glad, in this breathless, oppressive heat, soon to pick up a rickshaw which took me to my quarters. As I drove I noticed anxious faces constantly turned towards the sullen clouds, from which occasional large drops spat into the dust with a heavy splash. My rickshaw coolie also looked up and accelerated his speed. Close to my destination we came upon a funeral procession. Chinese boys in ragged blue shirts and wide-brimmed pointed hats were beating drums and gongs which clashed with rattling echoes through the narrow streets, thick with the dust raised by many hurrying feet. Immediately behind them the massive, heavily fluted coffin swung up and down on its elastic red pole like a palanquin, the bearers staggering along under their heavy weight with heads stretched forward and swollen veins. A single mourner followed, wrapped in very dirty linen, and supported, almost carried, by two elderly men, being epileptic. Frothing and foaming, and with head thrown far back and feet far forward, he seemed to be treading on air. This procession was followed by a gazing, chattering crowd, and some empty rickshaws on the look-out for fares.

The atmosphere grew darker and tenser, for the blue-black clouds were heavy to bursting-point, and a slaty-

violet gloom spread and deepened till in the early afternoon the sky suddenly burst into a downpour of hail, like continuous machine-gun firing. In the twinkling of an eye all was transformed into a winter landscape, and the air grew very cold. Half an hour later, a steady deluge set in, the like of which Kalgan had never yet experienced, burying half the town under rushing water. Muddy torrents raged down the streets, turning courtyards into foam-covered lakes, and flooding the houses. Wood drifted about, and swollen corpses of cats and dogs turned and spun in eddies, like inflated balloons. When darkness settled into night, sheet-lightning flared and quivered for whole minutes through the torn black clouds. As we splashed along ankle-deep in the subsiding water, a few shots rang out, and the shoemaker from the house in front waded to meet us, swinging his arms and shouting: 'They are plundering.' Horn signals sounded into the night, and a few more shots, sharp, like the cracking of whips.

The bridge that at noon hung high over the dried river-bed, had completely vanished, torn away like matchwood by the rushing floods which swept over the lower parts of the town, obliterating all life. A night of feverish unrest followed, filled with the wildest rumours. Towards morning the water had to a great degree subsided, and was running off in channels it had cut into the drifted sand left by the flood. Everywhere dead dogs and cats lay about, their glossy wet coats, though full of fine sand, having the texture of well-brushed top hats. Strange to say, there were no dead rats to be seen.

Dawn was yet grey when I was up and on my way to the house of Sanban at the end of a street near by. Here, too, I found the yard covered with sand-drifts, and one large shallow pool left, with planks laid across to the centre building, where some Mongols were busy emptying bucket-fuls of water out of the rooms.

Sanban was a Mongol nobleman owning property in the Chakha region of Inner Mongolia, in the direction of Dolo-nor. He had the polished manners of a Chinese grandee, for he had been educated at the Peking University. Under his polish lay a forceful and free character, aglow with genial good nature. He had come to Kalgan on business, and invited me to return with him to his home. We were to start in two days. I found him preparing to visit General Feng. He greeted me and remarked that it was an evil night, confirming the reports of plunder. He told me the sudden flood had left thousands of corpses in the lower part of the town, and that the river bank was strewn with the bodies of men and animals. Many of these corpses had been pillaged during the night.

Then he led me to the back of the house and showed me the body of a Chinese woman propped against the wall with low hanging head. The hair clung to her temples and was covered with fine sand. Her blue jacket, closed at the neck, clung to her sloping shoulders but gaped open below, showing the tightly trousered legs and baggy stomach. Sanban lifted the limp arm and hand; the middle finger had been cut off at the root, and her ears torn for the earrings – a revolting sight. Sanban, however, seemed unaffected, and simply remarked that, the corpse being on his ground, he would have to pay for the coffin – about ten dollars. I accompanied him across the railway line and field towards the General's headquarters. Soldiers were patrolling in all directions with fixed bayonets. We came to a crowd of civilians and grey-clad soldiers huddled together. Near by, a row of decapitated bodies lay with hands tied behind and the bloody nape showing between their shoulders, the heads lying a few paces further on, with gaping mouths and half-closed eyes. A soldier stood near at hand, busily cleaning some red splashes from his breeches with paper. A few Chinese were examining the

heads to see if any were known to them; apparently they were as little affected by the shameful deeds and their drastic punishment as Sanban was, when lifting that mutilated dead hand. He only said, 'Funny business.' What do these curious people feel at the sight of such horrors? Mere curiosity? Death means so little to them – hence the pillaging of corpses.

Yesterday's sweltering heat, the funeral procession, and the staggering epileptic, seemed an eternity removed from the clear cool sky of today, and this waiting crowd herded together with their hands tied behind them guarded by soldiers with bayonets. I shuddered when I realized they were going to be beheaded. Over the fields a new batch was being brought in, a few hundred civilians and soldiers, some even drawn in rickshaws. This crowd that yesterday thronged the busy streets all eagerly and diligently bent on their business, an hour or two later with the same diligent eagerness robbed and pillaged corpses, and were now about to die.

Behind one of the batches the little Pekinese battle-hound came yapping, his voice inaudible in the din, followed by his master, General Feng, towering above all the other men in his peasant shirt with a grey military cap on his head. He had given these drastic orders, with his eyes fixed on some Utopian ideal, for he was a dreamer, it seemed, filled with a childish desire to do good, and caught unawares in the meshes of a dangerous net. Being a Christian gave him the privilege of becoming a general.

A few days later we left Kalgan in Sanban's car. The bridge being destroyed, we drove down into the river's bed, and sought along the banks for a suitable crossing. Soldiers were busy digging in the mud and sand-drifts, which were littered with debris of all kinds mixed with inflated corpses, both human and animal. In a pool of water the bodies of some girls were washed together.

evidently from a Chinese 'house of joy,' judging by the brighter and more elegant clothing.

The clear morning sunshine shone placidly on dead faces covered with mud and dirt, and on contorted bodies. Sanban leant back complacently in his car, and did not seem in the least perturbed by these horrible sights, as we wound our way through, until at last we found a place where we could push the car up the other bank. After this was accomplished, Kalgan vanished behind us like Sodom in the day of its visitation. Having topped the bank, we soon had to return to the river-bed again, and made slow progress, for the wheels sank to the hub in silted sand, and turned without grip. We had to pull, and shove, and dig in turns, Sanban happy as a child, enjoying the fun of pushing the car with his own hands. After a time we reached a village from whence our path ran up a steep incline. Some welcome tea and biscuits was provided, and then all the bullocks of the village were requisitioned, even cows and mules, and harnessed to the car. But at the first whirr of the machine they took fright and tried to stampede, pulling in all directions against the ropes that held them. In a cloud of petrol and dust and much shouting and flourishing of whips the Chinese tried to urge the terrified animals onwards. Here and there one broke loose and escaped, and from the side gazed wide-eyed and snorting at our helpless car. Once more the animals were sorted into order, and all obstacles cleared from the path. By this time the whole population of the village had turned out to watch us. Dirty little children, clad only in short red jackets, the hair of their partly shaven heads arranged into quaint plaited horns on each side, begged for alms from the shelter of their draggled mothers' arms. '*Tunsar*,' they all cried, with outstretched hands. After several fruitless efforts, a few more mules were brought, terrible objects of pity, with raw wounds on their ribs and shoulders,

surrounded by swarms of flies. By now a dozen animals were harnessed to our car and twenty human shoulders pushing – with more vocal than bodily exertion, no doubt. The engine was started once more: a jerk, and the car lurched forward amid howls and cries as the animals staggered and pulled at the traces. This time the car jolted and bumped up the incline while we followed with heavy stones to stop the wheels from running back. The road was cut deep between the banks, and this kept the animals together, rushing forward to escape the noise of the machine, and so we at last reached the top, completely exhausted, and glad to prop our blocks of stone behind the wheels, noticing only now after the excitement had abated how heavy they had been. I sank against the bank feeling as if my heart and lungs would burst, and lay there awhile. The steep banks gleamed in the midday heat as though the road had been cut into a variegated cake: a layer of pale sand, a streak of rusty brown, another of bluish-grey clay, and then a pale layer of chalky deposit. The almost vertical lines might have been painted in wide curves of various colours – they were a geological fresco, recording countless antediluvian ages; a negative plate of prehistoric life with minute details of scales and bones, from the finest fragments to sections as thick as trees of some ancient monster. Under the surface of this wide landscape lay records of life from its earliest stages, buried by some elemental catastrophe in sand and clay, while fresh mounds of earth rose out of the swampy waters to clothe themselves in renewed verdure and life. Only a few feet below the sun-parched grass of the surface this soil was full of sea-shells, and these banks stretched away towards the torn outline of mountainous country in the far distance.

As soon as we had recovered, we proceeded with our drive, and three hours later reached a plateau of pasture land to the north-east, passing some crumbling heaps of

ancient Chinese walls. Running at the speed of forty miles an hour our car seemed to crawl over the vast expanse of grass that covered this geological storehouse of buried mysteries of thousands of millions of years, materials for historic records, verifications of scientific theory.

The setting sun began to draw veils of colour over the sky; pale at first, then increasing in glow, and finally turning into a blood-red ball, it slipped below the horizon which rose in darkening outline against the vivid sky, blazing in a fire of afterglow as though heralding a new morning from the west. But this sudden glory faded like the last flicker of breath from the lungs of a dying man, till the growing darkness revealed a gradually increasing splendour of stars, spreading over our heads the huge dial of eternity.

As rapidly as the sun set, the day's warmth was lapped up by the cold breath of night, which blew about our ears as we drove on and on. The stars now were our only guide as they wheeled in great curves slowly upwards, and as slowly sank again. Our searchlight played on the plain before us, and streamed out into the raven-black darkness. Gnats passing through the disc of light became little sparks against the undulations of the steppes that came towards us, their edges sharp against shadows like dark caverns; but our car passed smoothly over all, as if we were a ball rolling over a billiard-table. Then the headlight was turned off, causing a sudden surprise at the luminosity of the sky on this moonless night. From the passing wheels the ground fell away into darkness, yet there was enough light from the stars to read by. Guided by their light we cautiously felt our way across the steppes till Sanban suddenly tapped the chauffeur's shoulder and stopped the car. We all listened into the night with extended necks, the chauffeur leaning out and trying to probe the darkness with his eyes, but in spite of the starlight the human eyes

cannot see far. These people seemed to have ears like bats, for through the engine's throb Sanban had noticed a noise. Horses? We hoped not, in this region infested by bandits that crop up suddenly and, like a bad dream, vanish again as quickly into nothing; for the daylight would only reveal harmless peasants tilling the fields about their villages with prehistoric implements. The chauffeur, ejaculating 'Bullock caravan,' caught his clutch and started off, switching on the headlamps. Even I now heard a distant creaking and groaning across the inarticulate silence of night, when I dissociated my hearing from the even throb of the motor. The light was turned sideways – a few yards away the head of an endless string of bullock carts came in view, their rough wooden wheels creaking in every discordant note imaginable – a symphony of the steppes. It was a caravan carrying salt from Dolo-nor to Kalgan. The eyes of the oxen emitted phosphorescent gleams as they caught the rays of our headlamps in passing, in endless procession. Only three men guided this long string of carts, and they looked more like wandering spirits under the tentlike covering they wore over their heads and shoulders.

Slowly the stars moved overhead, and a faint glimmer of dawn began to flush the east when we halted at a lonely well to refill the radiator. The water left in the flat watering troughs round the well shone in the vague dawn like liquid lead. Each moment new forms leaped into the distinct outlines of day. We looked into the well and were startled to see our faces against a bit of pale sky looking back at us as it were through a hole in the ground. Then the sun sprang up and flooded all in fresh, warm light. Not a living soul was in sight, anywhere on this wide plain.

A light meal was in preparation. Cases were opened, tins brought out. Our Mongols collected dry dung for the camp fire, on which a tea-kettle was swung, and meat roasted

on skewers of green twigs. The water had a strange smooth taste of soda, leaving a soapy feeling in one's mouth. Soon everyone was digesting his breakfast in a deathlike sleep, Sanban lying on his back, his hands folded on his chest, and his head propped on a stone. He breathed heavily with open mouth and whistling nostrils. The Mongols sat round on their haunches, their heads resting on arms folded about their knees. A delightful warmth spread like a refreshing bath.

By the time I awoke the sun had climbed a good bit higher, and its heat was steadily increasing. Cows and bullocks stood about us in a semicircle stolidly staring as they waited to be watered by their herdsman who tarried in the distance. His approach was greeted by a husky lowing as the animals gathered round the water troughs, and with dilated nostrils sucked up the water poured therein. The man's wiry sinews worked with the regularity of a machine, raising and lowering the pole attached to the bucket and filling the troughs, till with slaked thirst the animals moved off one after the other to graze. The Chinese herdsman then squatted on his haunches beyond our circle, staring expectantly. He took up and examined an empty tin, smelled at it, and put it carefully by his side. A cigarette offered him he took at once and searched for a glowing cinder in the ashes of the fire. He begged for the empty petrol tins as we filled the car, and got two. With radiant eyes he examined their corners, and stared at his reflection in their shining sides; drummed on them with his fingers, and went off with his treasures, in the wake of the animals, to vanish as suddenly in the seemingly flat and boundless plain as he had come.

We proceeded straight across the pathless country in a north-easterly direction. A few wildfowl flew across our line with a whirr of wings. Soon a herd of antelope came in view in little groups of eight to twenty. They eyed us

attentively from a distance of four hundred to a thousand yards. Sanban did not rise to the suggestion of having a shot. Why shoot such creatures? A wolf was another matter! He had shot more than a thousand wolves with pistol or rifle from horseback, and once again he muttered, 'Funny business!' The scenery hardly changed. Presently, towards noon, a few jurts appeared like grey molehills. Two or three rough ponies stood near, saddled with narrow, curved, red saddles, their forelegs tied together. Some dogs ran to meet us, barking furiously and leaping at the running wheels.

This was part of Sanban's property. We halted before the first jurt, causing the ponies to hobble away with the jumping action of performing circus ponies. The door opened and a Mongol came stooping out, dragging his feet. The sleeves and breast of his coat were shiny with encrusted dirt, and from the wide cuff of his tube-shaped sleeve the beads of a rosary dangled. He laid both hands on the folded hood of the car and talked to Sanban, who presently got out and bade me follow him into the jurt. Several men squatted within, and a young woman. After the usual salutation of '*Zan-bai-na*,' she rose, and taking up the porcelain bowls on the floor, wiped them with the hem of her dirty garment and handed them to us. The Mongol who had received us filled them with very black tea from a bulky kettle over a brazier in the centre of the hut. Then the woman brought a bowl of whitish-grey broiled something, put it before us, and asked us to help ourselves. I observed that she had slender, delicately formed fingers, and pale, well-shaped nails, dark-rimmed with dirt. Imperturbable indolence showed in her beady eyes and the lethargic lines of her plump body. Her flat face was heavily marked with smallpox, and was surrounded with dull silver jewelry and bright red corals. She took no active part, and showed little interest, in the conversation. Sanban

put down his empty bowl and returned to the car. Everyone, even the woman, came out of the jurt to see us start. A few children hopped about with joy when they saw our car move off without being pulled by any visible creature.

The primitive inhabitants of these wide plains have few belongings and fewer luxuries; one or two brass-bound or copper milk-pans, and in crying contrast some empty petrol and kerosene tins; indigenous necklaces of hand-wrought silver inset with corals and milky-green malachite, surmounted by cheap felt hats obviously of European make – Europe of today cheek by jowl with Asia of yesterday and the day before.

By the time the plains began to flush again with the rust-brown tints of sunset we had come about two hundred miles from Sanban's outlying estate. Some distance ahead to the side of our path a herd of antelope stood motionless on their slender legs eyeing us. As we approached across the grass, the leading antelope began to trot forward, the others following suit single file at equal distances. There were thirty-two in all, looking like parading horses in a musical ride. Then they again halted, and eyed our advancing box on wheels for a moment, only to spring into active flight, like a shower of arrows. Galloping ahead they crossed our line of progress about fifty yards in front of us, close enough for me to see the red-brown glint of their coats and their scuts like a line of white spots. Sanban stopped the car, but though the sporting instinct stirred in me, it was too late to shoot, for with unbelievable rapidity they all melted away into specks on the wide plain. Almost on the skyline they stood once more and stared back at us.

Alas! Something had run across our line of progress, a bad omen, thought Sanban, and so, though only a hundred and fifty miles from our destination, we turned back the way we had come till we reached a well we had passed a couple of hours previously, and here we called a halt. Our

journey for today was ended, for in spite of his education at the Peking University and his knowledge of philosophy and the fine arts, friend Sanban's mind was overshadowed by a dark cloud of superstition. So when we reached the well we prepared to camp there till midnight ended this inauspicious day. But it was long past that hour before Sanban awoke from his heavy slumbers. I had cogitated over various things during the night, which led me to ask next morning if there was a monastery in the vicinity of Sanban's domain. He told me there was one only a few miles away to the north, and that many interesting ceremonies connected with the lamas' temple took place near his house. Also that he had an old lama priest resident in his household, who conducted the services in the chapel and generally looked after the spiritual welfare of the family and the community of Mongols around. His answer corroborated my conjectures of the previous night – that his actions were not only the outcome of natural superstition, but were partly inspired by a lively fear of the gods' displeasure, which was being kept alive in him by one who could invest the simplest occurrences of life with cunning significance. His guileless answer awoke my interest in this lama priest who could rule simple souls with such authority.

Our drive was without further incident as we moved towards an undulating horizon that grew more and more hilly until we reached a little cluster of dots we had seen from afar, which proved to be Sanban's home. It consisted of a few jurts surrounding a walled yard that enclosed a group of buildings with curved Chinese roofs. This was his summer residence. We drew up to the large gate which stood wide open, all view of the interior impeded by a 'demon wall' built about five paces within the gate and whitewashed to a snowy glare. Evil spirits seeking entrance would run against this wall and be destroyed, for apparently

it never occurs to these spirits in their furious haste to turn aside. Demons and evil spirits cannot travel on indirect or curved paths, hence the arched demon-proof bridges that span the water to a house or pavilion, and all the bends and zigzags so prevalent in these countries. Sanban was bent on safeguarding his house from the demons of China as well as from those of his own country.

Two or three Mongols came out to greet Sanban, who, with a courteous gesture, bade me enter before him, as he stood with his travelling-rug folded neatly over his arm. The building within the yard extended along the square of the walls, under the deep overlap of the roof, while an elevated gangway of planks led past the various entrances and windows – the latter barred and pasted from within with paper. As we passed, Sanban opened each door, shouted a greeting, and then closed it again, until we reached the centre building and entered it. Within, on the elevated *chan* or *podium* about three feet high, mats were spread and a low Chinese table placed, of graceful workmanship, with delicate porcelain bowls set upon it. The *chan*, which is used as a sleeping place and can generally be heated from below, ran along the entire length of the room, leaving only a narrow passage from door to door. Sanban got on to it and sat down cross-legged like a Buddha near the little table. I followed suit, but soon had to change my unaccustomed and cramped position, as my legs began to go to sleep. A woman of mixed Chinese and Mongolian descent entered with many bows, and addressed smiling words to Sanban while she filled our porcelain bowls with pale tea, and put down the teapot, after which she withdrew. Through the paper-covered windows a cool, diffused light penetrated this bare but comfortable room, in which the little table was the only furniture. Sanban lived here only during the short hot summer. In autumn the jurts, which were much warmer, were occupied. So, as soon as we had

finished our tea, Sanban led me to a large jurt in the back-yard, not built as jurts usually are, on the ground, but on a round wooden platform. He opened the red lacquer door ornamented with a golden circular ornament, and looked into the dark interior; then he pulled a rope that hung from the roof, which I noticed ended in an intricate knot symbolizing domestic happiness. This drew back the felt covering the round skylight, and the room was flooded with light, revealing an unexpected blaze of colours. The walls were hung with cool blue silk damask forming a cupola held up in the centre by four red lacquer supports. The floor was spread with woollen Chinese carpets of ochre-yellow, red and purple ground, patterned with deep blue branches and copper-coloured borders. Red lacquer chests stood in a row round the circular wall, and on these cone-shaped milkpans of embossed silver ringed with gold. Opposite to the entrance stood a tall cupboard richly ornamented with glinting gold, on the top of which silver butter lamps were placed in a row before a fluted shrine inlaid with mirror fragments and containing the image of Amithaba, with his eleven heads and the halo of his thousand arms spreading in all directions from his golden body. Fans of iridescent peacock's feathers stood in silver-spouted copper teapots at each side. This kaleidoscopic wealth of colour rushed upon me as I entered the silken chamber, the many colours clashing and interweaving in suppressed discords like lama music in a distant temple. Then I saw Sanban stoop over a shaggy fur rug covering a sleeping form, that slowly turned its face upward and raised itself on its elbows. A woman of large full proportions emerged wrapped in salmon-pink silk which clung in gleaming folds about her. Many silver bangles jangled on her dirty wax-coloured wrists, and her fingers were covered with the pale hoops of rings set with malachite and coral. For a moment her Asiatic Buddha face stared in impassive

calm, and then her purple lips parted in a smile, disclosing strong white teeth. She drew up her knees, closed her hand into a fist with thumb stuck high, and said '*Za-za*,' with a happy sibilant indrawing of breath to denote her pleasure, and then sat up on crossed legs and asked a lot of questions, her eyes wandering towards me. Feeling somewhat disconcerted under her astonished examination, I tried to smile. 'Foreigner,' she exclaimed, and beckoned me to be seated beside her. She touched my face with her dirty tapering fingers, placed her hand flat beside mine, and seemed amused at the difference of colour and texture. Through her parted robe one could see the heavy breathing of her full, floppy bosom, on which an amulet hung in a flat linen bag greasy with sweat and dirt. No doubt she had worn it from childhood, a second heart as it were hanging between her breasts, full of prayers and fragments of stone from Bogdo-Ool, or mud that had touched the feet of the Hutuktu.

She leaned back on her elbow and playfully stroked my hand, while Sanban laughed as at some obscene joke, and repeated the encouraging gesture with which he had invited me to enter his house. He said he would fetch tea, and was about to leave me with this plump lady of Asia. In spite of my growing discomfiture, I could not help admiring the ease with which she gave herself for a moment to the animal instincts of love-making, ready, no doubt, to throw her new toy away as soon as her curiosity had been satisfied. At that moment, however, a lama entered, and put an end to the awkward situation. Shuffling along in his canoe-shaped shoes he approached Sanban and greeted him. So this was the lama – this man in a dirty strawberry robe with a scarf of brighter red drapery round his shoulders, of which one end hung to the ground, over the bent tube of his sleeve. A rosary of carved beads dangled out of the blue silk cuffs that covered his hands. Over high

cheek-bones and a massive jaw, his shaven skull had a blue tint. His searching gaze examined me for a moment as he squatted down near the door, staring before him, and fingering his rosary. His bluish lips twitched with unspoken words as the beads fell with a soft click through his fingers. He leant his elbow on his knees and sat on, careless whether or not he might be intruding. This lady of Mongolia beside me began smoking a long-stemmed Chinese pipe with a very small bowl which she emptied and refilled after each whiff. She had apparently forgotten my presence, for she leaned back on her fur rug, scratched her head, and with interest examined the black rims of her pale finger-nails. Sanban, now quite serious, told the lama about the flood at Kalgan, while the latter listened attentively without interrupting his muttered prayers. I saw this lady of Mongolia again when I passed the jurt a week later, sitting in the sun. It pleased her to throw horse dung at me, and to laugh with an unfriendly glint in her eye.

. . . . .

I was painting a picture of the house temple, and soon after I got busy the lama came past and went to squat on red cushions behind a low table at the side of the altar. He lifted the silver lids from the jade bowls, and pushed the bell and the *dorje*, moved the drum made of two human skulls covered with milky-green human skin, and arranged various objects around him. Then, quite ignoring my presence, he began intoning occult prayers in a harsh bass voice, varying from slow to quick in rhythm and from high discords to deep booming notes, half singing, half speaking.

On the table before him lay the long narrow strips of Tibetan scriptures of which he turned the loose leaves, piling them together on their wooden lid, with widespread fingers and half-closed eyes:

'Recognize the eyes of instinct, the eyes of transient flesh, the eyes of birds and beasts of prey, that see further than the eyes of man.

'See the heavenly eyes, the eyes of Devas, like buds of flowers able to hold both human life and their own, the buried past and the future births in both worlds, in the eternity of their past, the eternity of their being, and the eternity of their becoming.

'O clear eyes of truth, like a mirror, eyes of the Bodhis-Attvas that behold hundreds of world-periods both past and to come.

'Divine eyes, clear as the azure skies, O eyes of the highest most divine Bodhis-Attvas, beholding millions of world-periods both past and to come.

'Lo, the eyes of the wisdom of Buddha, purer than the cloudless ether, clearer than the bluest sky, reflecting more than the mirror reflects, more immaculate than the bud of a flower. Lo, the eyes of the wisdom of Buddha that contemplate eternity. *Om mani padme hum.*'

With regular movements of his wrists the lama turns the skull drum to right and to left, causing the beads attached to a short cord to hit the drum, while the image of Amithaba the benign gleams down at him from above the steady flames of the butter lamps. His thousand arms are spread like a halo round him, the palm of each of his hands having an eye – symbolizing the all-seeing, ever-consoling, the helper of the poor and oppressed – Chenreszi.

The chant subsided into a monotonous murmur, gradually dying away like water in sand. The eyes of the lama closed as though he were asleep, but the beads of his rosary did not cease to slip through his fingers with a click. In the tomblike silence I heard the blood pulsing in my temples. Outside in the sunlight, which sent soft reflected lights into this cool vault, sparrows were disputing vigorously.

Two hours later the lama rises, and comes dragging past me as though intoxicated and unconscious of my presence. Not long after, Sanban politely warned me to be sure not to throw cigarette ends away in the temple – though of course I had not dreamed of smoking there. He also asked me how soon my work would be completed. He repeated this question every time we met, and I felt he would prefer to have told me openly that my presence in the temple was undesirable to the old lama, and that I had better stay away; yet I know he made excuses for me to the lama, and that Eastern etiquette only allows of indirect and flowery suggestions.

For the last three months I had been trying to persuade Sanban to let me paint his consort. But every week brought some postponement: once she was said to be dangerously ill, though I caught sight of her almost daily. Sanban brought another woman to sit in her clothes, but I persevered like a Tartar butting at a Chinese wall, and finally threatened to depart. Thereupon Sanban agreed, and promised me four sittings. I felt that the lama was pulling the strings in my disfavour, though I was never able to exchange a word with him. At last Sanban took me to his jurt. The lady lay on her couch as before, but this time she rose sullenly, and without any salutation. Sanban gave orders and, like a child obeying unwillingly, she began to straighten the silver jewelry on her head and breast, which seemed suddenly to inconvenience her. Then she left us, and after waiting an hour, Sanban went to fetch her. I began to regret my persistence, for she showed such repugnance, and ignored my request to turn more to one side. She filled her long Chinese pipe and smoked sullenly. Sanban let her do as she liked, and indicated my place close to the door of the jurt, where the light was all wrong, and I had no room to move. Then he took a stool and seated his wife on it like a puppet; laid her limp hands

on her knees; touched the pleats of her sleeve and dress, and placed an alarm clock beside her. I remembered seeing this object of questionable taste on every photo of a Mongol woman I had seen, though the reason why remains a mystery to me still. It was all very uncomfortable, and I wondered if things would have turned out differently had I, on our first introduction, shown more willingness for a flirtation. This Mongolian lady had made up her mind to be offended, and egged herself on in this feeling.

She sat just as she was placed, like a sphinx made of stone, not stirring an eyelash, it seemed. Her uncanny stillness alarmed me and in no way eased my task; she ignored several suggestions to rest, and I began to get nervous. My brow grew moist as I worked. The sitting would surely not be repeated, for this motionlessness was as unnatural as it was unnecessary, and even disturbing. No doubt the lady was making the worst of things, so as to have a good excuse against repetition. When I ended the sitting, she rose and left the jurt at once, ignoring me completely.

I returned to my jurt and contemplated the sketch with disgust, but set to work again the next day with fresh courage. For an hour I sat waiting at my place before Sanban's lady appeared in other clothes; and most unwillingly she changed into the clothes worn the previous day just where she stood, without revealing her person, and sat down on the stool with a yawn that threatened to dislocate her jaw. She yawned all the time, and where the previous day had been all rigid tension, this was the reverse in slackness. There was a constant coming and going of people who crowded round me, and poked their heads into my line of vision, making me nervous. If I had suffered from insufficient elbow-room in this cramped space the day before, today was enough to drive me to despair, augmented by the most unpleasant odour of those

who crowded round me. My model kept chattering with everyone. Finally, to make matters worse, the lama appeared, squatted between me and my model, and began telling his beads. His presence was like a sinister cloud, and even the Mongols round me melted away one by one. Through the round skylight the sun poured in, and the jurt became unbearably hot; the crowd had left the penetrating smell of their sweat-laden garments behind them, and I began to feel ill. Just then a woman came, leading in a little boy who trundled up to my model, pushed himself between her knees, clutched at her, and dug his face into her bosom. She opened the buttons of her bib, and the boy greedily helped himself to what he wanted, kneading with his hands as he sucked. He rolled his head from one side to the other as he burrowed into that mass of slack flesh as though he meant to eat his way through a mountain. The mother put her arms round the child and encircled him with her feet, while the noises of his sucking in this tight embrace were like sounds of suffocation. An expression of animal content spread over the mother's face, as she sat with half-open mouth and half-closed eyes. What was visible of her body seemed a mass of greyish-yellow dirt, covered with purple spots and warts as large as peas. I rose in disgust and left the jurt, feeling like a ship's passenger on a bad crossing. I went to my quarters, called my servant, and sent him to fetch my belongings.

Under such circumstances it was hopeless to attempt further work; and, dissatisfied with what I had so far done, I took my palette knife, and in an attack of impotent rage erased the face. Then I lit a pipe and went out for a long walk over the steppes to clear my head and think out the situation. After some hours I returned, and though I had padlocked the door of my jurt, I noticed on entering that the pictures had been disarranged. Mongols often came into my hut unasked when I was there, squatted down in silence for

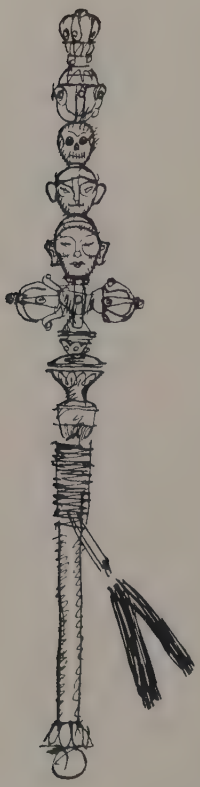
a while, and left again. But this evident opening of a locked door was disquieting. I went to my servant's jurt close by, but found it empty. On the half-burnt fire a pot had boiled over, filling the air with the smell of burnt meat. The cook must have left in the midst of his work, and my ponies were also gone. Had some misfortune happened? Twilight was rapidly falling, and the distance being veiled in shadows, even the view of Sanban's quarters was blurred and dim. Back in my jurt I examined the lock, which opened easily; then I looked through my various pictures with apprehension, and found the one of Sanban's consort missing.

Just then I heard, or felt through the ground, the soft quick beat of galloping horses approaching, and ran out. My boy was galloping in hot haste towards me, leading the second pony. He jumped down saying: 'Quick, master, quick, mount.' Then he ran in and snatched the fur from my couch, a rifle in each hand. 'Where cartridges? Quick, master.' And he put two belts of them over his shoulders, and ran to the kitchen hut to collect a few tins of food. In a moment he was back, saying, 'All right, go quick, quick; lama stealing picture.' I began to grasp the situation, as we mounted and galloped into the evening wind, across the wide plains. We seemed to avoid the many rat-holes we flew past as by magic. The ponies snorted as we dodged a scampering rat, a bat nearly collided with us. Stars began to come out as we galloped on, till we reached the ruined remains of an old tower on a slight elevation. Here we halted and Chang told me what had taken place. Soon after my departure the lama rode up with two other Mongols who began to talk with my servants. Chang noticed that the lama soon disappeared, but knowing my jurt to be locked he paid no further attention for the moment. Then he grew uneasy, went to my jurt, found it apparently closed, and saw the lama riding away in the distance. He noticed that our ponies had been untied, caught them, and

returned to the two Mongols. These now said I had sent them to fetch the ponies, but Chang would not give them up, saying he knew where I was; so the Mongols mounted and left. Then thinking I might really have need of the ponies he mounted one, put the coolie on the other, and rode to meet me in the direction the Mongols had taken. On nearing Sanban's quarters they heard there was trouble over the rumour that I had put the picture of Sanban's wife under the influence of evil spirits, who turned the face into a grimace which kept changing colour. Sanban's wife, catching sight of the featureless face, fell into a fit and lay rolling in the dirt, foaming at her mouth, eyes, and nose. They said her body was swollen and discoloured with illness or approaching death, and only her guru could handle her. I could picture that stout heaving woman rolling about in the terror of impotent ignorance, like an animal, amid all the wealth of Sanban's jurt, while the lama in his deep bass chanted occult incantations into her unheeding ear. This devil of a lama knew his business well, and was now drawing the eyeteeth from the spirits of hell I had let loose over Sanban's household!

What was Sanban's attitude? Would superstition blind and master him? Would hope win, or despair, with the lama ever at his elbow trying to draw his soul into the complicated intricacies of darkness? My life was in the hands of this fanatical lama, who was fighting like a human beast to maintain his sovereignty. It would be folly to return to these misguided people, incapable as they were of listening to reason. So we put the ponies under shelter of the wall, and took up a position of defence. Chang said he had told the coolie to collect all my belongings and bring them either to Kalgan, or to this spot next day. Poor Sanban! Would reason win? My mind was full of conjectures as we passed the night under the wide sky, and I was thankful when dawn came to relieve me of evil dreams.

About ten o'clock we saw a travelling-cart with a blue awning, such as the Chinese use, coming over the skyline towards us. It proved to be in charge of the coolie and another Chinese. Reason and Sanban's good sense, plus the polish of a Chinese gentleman, had after all won the day.



GAESAR

A Belgian missionary, 'Father Redbeard,' appeared one early morning before my jurt. This was his second visit in the last four months. He came accompanied by two Chinese servants, in large bowler hats, baptized into the Catholic Church some years ago. His Chinese saddle, his black gown, and Chakha boots were grey with the dust of a long ride. As he dismounted, a ray of sunlight brought out a coppery glint on his beard. He took off his smoked spectacles, and gazed over the wide steppe land towards where the endless horizon of quivering red expanse merged into the glassy blue of the sky. Here in these uncultivated regions, bordered by an ethereal semicircle of low hills to the far east, was a wide field for missionary enterprise. Dotted about were the dark or light specks of grazing herds, and over all was spread the imperturbable peace of a cloudless summer's day in all its unending blue. Those low hills yonder were China's long arm curved round these remote regions, uncultivated, and very sparsely populated, into which Chinese peasants were being pushed forward slowly, after having duly embraced the cross Father Redbeard pressed upon their breasts. This, he felt, was his domain, this no-man's-land, which was that man's land who chose to take possession of it. Father Redbeard's rides extended from his mission house in Chinese territory, like the fingers of a widespread hand, in various directions into the steppes of inner Mongolia, which he was gradually occupying with his Chinese converts and their families.

He came to visit them now and again, and to hold a

short service in their huts, and on such occasions one might hear some such words as these: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap . . . John confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ . . . He it is that coming after me is preferred before me . . .' Then he would swing into his saddle, and push his gilt-edged pocket Bible between two buttons of his gown, revealing with coquettish austerity a portion of the slender silver cross he always wore.

. . . . .

Here was Father Redbeard after one of these long rides dismounting before my jurt, and being dusted from head to foot with a yak-hair whisk by his attendants.

Not so very far away on the south-east horizon one could see the latest Chinese hut of sun-dried bricks, erected within the last few days, and already inhabited by a diligent family of twelve, who harnessed themselves to the primitive plough, and tore gashes into the soil of the steppes. Father Redbeard by cunning strategy had already managed to occupy hundreds of miles of this unoccupied land with his converts. These industrious Chinese peasants were out on their fields before daybreak, not returning home till darkness fell, and the area of soil under cultivation spread a little further every year with clocklike regularity. These people were simple-hearted and opened to kindness. Nevertheless, missionary influence dried up in this sandy soil of mixed blood, where different customs indicated the invisible walls of other worlds, drawn across these flat and vast expanses. Unconsciously Father Redbeard felt that he had reached a dead point. The first movable jurts confronted him like restless wandering spectres, in contrast to the immobile Chinese mud huts fixed amongst their tilled fields. Those jurts followed the call of the steppes. Where

a settlement was found one day, a fortnight later there might be only a few round patches of yellow grass flattened down and temporarily paled by want of exposure to the sunlight.

The spreading tide of Christian teaching somehow failed to penetrate the closed and covered foreheads of these wandering tribes of Mongolia. Father Redbeard's rides occasionally took him past some of these jurts, where he would stop and enter to drink a bowl of tea, and would try hard to establish confidence and sympathy, but with no result. So he gradually avoided the jurts when strategically planting out his converted Chinese. But the invisible walls proved insurmountable, because not far away, hidden behind the undulations of the steppe land, lay an important lamasery. Its outward appearance was entirely Chinese, with curved roofs of grooved tiles and high-walled courts. But the horde of red-frocked monks who inhabited it had the strong square heads, blue-shaven and pock-marked, of Mongols, and wore Mongolian boots. Their high cheek-bones gave the appearance of a swollen face peering over the red scarves that were wound about their shoulders and arms and dragged in ample folds in the dust behind them. These were the real masters of the boundless steppe land on which Father Redbeard's eyes now rested. All his kindly endeavours had been of no avail against their obstinate reserve, and he was envious of the spell under which these gloomy monks kept the souls of their wandering community. The missionary assured me that he had never entered this monastery; in fact, he appeared to avoid it nervously, while trying to undermine its sinister influence in outlying districts by his presence, teaching, and example. Each of his wordy attempts to storm this stronghold was listened to for a moment by the Mongols, only to be immediately drowned by the roll of drums, the blare of trumpets, and the monotonous sing-song

of the monks. They were all safe in the monks' net, buzzing like flies in a spider's web. Here hell sent its vilest odours heavenwards, and its poisoned atmosphere oxidized the smooth silver surface of poor Father Redbeard's ecclesiastical cross. Yet some magnetic power drew him, and kept him hovering round this Slough of Despond. The more eloquent his expression of horror and disgust, the more I realized his impotence to withstand the dark power that drew him. The poor man was scourging his flesh with words, while his soul was being tempted – a saint embracing vice and yet chastening it the while with a frenzy of prayers!

In the grey dawn of this particular morning, shortly after leaving the last Chinese hut, he had been shot at from a distance – he only heard a warning hiss and saw the dust kicked up close beside him. Some of the monks possessed Russian rifles, I knew, for they had exhibited them to me like children with a new toy, aiming playfully at one another. Father Redbeard also spoke of poison being laid for him as though he were a valuable fox. A servant of his had fallen ill on one of these expeditions, and died on their return to the mission house. I suggested Father Redbeard coming with me to visit the lamasery, but he defended himself against such an idea with unnecessary violence. On my return, however, he asked eagerly for every detail of my visit, again rousing my suspicion that he knew more about the place than I did. What was going on within him? Isolated in a strange world, he was endeavouring to win adherents to his Church amongst people who were incapable of grasping the truth of his Gospel, as their souls were moulded on different lines. And such converts as he got had an eye on the outward reward of land, rather than any definite inner convictions. This land was given them by God, he told them, who henceforth would look after them as His own children, but such words conveyed

nothing to them. Their density drove this ambassador of God to the verge of despair, and he longed for an opponent on equal footing, ready to assert the hopelessness of converting these people, so that he might defend his cause and object; because in this harrowing isolation with no outer contacts he began to suspect that he might be mistaken. He had, as it were, divided himself into two persons within the one frame, from sheer need of equal and intelligent companionship, when in moments of despair he viewed the impossibility of his task. Inhibitions of natural impulses became more and more artificial, caused by vacillating convictions that had lost their direction.

I noticed a change in Father Redbeard's face since last I had seen him. There was a strange tensity about his mouth, and a weakness quivered in his eyes; and I fancied that he looked like a hunted animal expecting a death shot from invisible pursuers. He could have gone back to China, but in the strength of his mission and because of the greatness of his work, he denied himself this retreat. No doubt the steppes had caught and now held him in their mysterious grasp. Would he end by burying his nails in the sand and murmuring: 'Earth, I am thy son! I have been sent out here to establish God, but the slit-eyed lamas hold the truth of His creation?'

While these thoughts went through my mind, he told me that these monks were fanatical adherents of the black Boën sect, the old original faith of Tibet and Mongolia in demonic phantoms of destruction, a faith sprung from the cruel austerity of the desolate country they inhabited. The people were completely ruled by the priests, and by various means tried to reconcile the irreconcilable. Strange sacrifices were offered to assuage the thirst that urges such demons to attack humanity by epidemics, heat, ice, and want.

Father Redbeard called this monastery the devil's

university, inhabited by mental abortions and cripples, like faces seen in distorting concave and convex mirrors. Their minds were perverted by the blackest occult aspects of their religion, and their souls were hag-ridden. The people gave up their firstborn sons in childhood to the care of the monastery, making this great sacrifice in the hope of acquiring the goodwill of the gods by a personal lien on the powers that rode them so mercilessly. Once in the monastery, these boys hung about the yards with the mangy mongrels, or stood at the temple doors, ready to fall with the dogs on any scraps of food flung out from the sacrifices. These boys were every monk's slave, in person and mentality; a dishevelled band of joy-lads on whom abominable vices were perpetrated to train and fit them for devilish purposes; for only a darkened soul could give itself without scruples to the black arts and, as the devil's own tool, turn and rend his power. For this reason the young mentality was twisted by these priests towards black magic and evil trickery, as the joints of circus children are twisted. Apparently the knowledge that gave power over evil was contained in ancient scriptures accessible only to the elect few, who through hard testing had shown their special worth. But the final key to the complete understanding of this secret knowledge was delivered orally in some exact formula. This was called 'the heritage of the highest ear'; and there was only one mysterious lama in existence said to be a reincarnation of Yeketarnitsi Padma Sambawa Baksi, the exorcist king, who long ago overthrew and killed all demons hostile to humanity except eight, who submitted and became the terrible Guardians of the Law. This lama was the devil in person, and according to his pleasure evil was either banished or broadcast unhindered over the country. An unassailable faith in the terrible powers of this man kept every Mongol obedient to the last extreme. 'Ha ha,' laughed the missionary, 'once in posses-

sion of these powers, anyone could become an extortioner in these merciless steppes with their undiluted human product, devoid of love, or pity, or gentleness.' The men in this monastery reflected nature like a mirror in their terrible creeds, minus all constructive thought or genuine indigenous philosophy. The laity were dominated by the same fear as the lamas who tried to circumvent it along occult by-ways.

The sun had topped the zenith of noon, and the atmosphere was like hot glass. Herds of horses were being driven up over the far-distant horizon towards the settlement of jurts. I looked at my watch – five minutes to one. Punctually they appeared every day at this time on yonder quivering horizon, as the many dots grazing far and wide were gathered into a variegated trotting medley driven forward by encouraging shouts from mounted herdsmen. The blazing sunlight played on crowded, joggling backs and manes, with a shooting glance like a heliograph here and there from the flanks of a white pony. The country was dry, and even from the greener patches dust rose in clouds, blurring the many hurrying legs and sinking in a low trail behind them. The herdsmen stood almost sideways in their stirrups, over the high, narrow saddles, their long, slender lassoing rods, about eighteen feet long, under their arms like bending lances. Their rough ponies were about ten hands high, sturdy and very fast.

Near the settlement the herd stopped, and turning in their saddles, the men prepared their long rods so that the leather strap hung at the end in the shape of a long-tailed slender 'P,' the shaft of which appeared to go right through the rider's silhouette. This was the signal for catching the mares in milk. In swerving gallop and wild jumps, followed by their long-legged, slender foals, the mares tried to evade their pursuers, hammering over the ground with legs flung out at full stretch, followed by the herdsmen bending far

forward in their saddles, and urging their mounts with shrill cries, till they could fling their loop with great dexterity over the mare's head. The men seemed to float over their saddles, showing the sky and the distant view between their legs, and turning at unbelievably abrupt angles to fling the loop, men and beasts appearing as ancient centaurs come to life, every muscle in full harmonious play of speed to win ahead. Once their quarry is lassoed, by a swing of the rod the loop is twisted tight enough to press the vein behind its jawbone; and then the captured mares are brought in and tethered in a row to a long rope stretched between two posts. And while the rest of the herd disperse again grazing, they stand in the quivering heat surrounded by a swarm of flies, shaking their heads and switching their tails. The herdsmen dismounted to lie in the cool shade of their jurts with their ponies standing hobbled close by, with drooping heads, and the slender lassoing rods leaning against their saddles like overlong whips. The deserted aspect lay simmering in the heat, all life at rest except the swarm of pestering flies that worry the animals. Towards three o'clock the two Chinese servants of my guest came in with blank faces . . . their ponies had vanished! Father Redbeard jumped up from the camp cot: 'How?' The men in bowler hats flew into a Chinese fit of excitement, disclaiming all blame at the highest pitch of their shrill voices. They had slept for an hour or two after their chow, the ponies safely hobbled and unable to move far. Father Redbeard gave frank vent to his opinion of their vigilance, at which one of them went into such a frenzy of rage that he foamed at the mouth, and every attempt to reason with him was useless. The poor fellow imagined that he had made a fool of himself, and in mad fury hit his skull against the wooden doorpost of my jurt. Father Redbeard and the other Chinaman clung to his arms, but he tore himself free and hurled himself

MOUNTED MONGOLIAN HERDSMEN

against the doorpost with such violence that the jurt swayed. His companion shouted full force to bring him back to reason, but he was bent on knocking his brains out. One last crack stunned him, and sinking on his knees he turned to lean against the felt wall, drawing one trembling knee up, the other leg stretched out full length. He was like a drunken man with a spinning world around him. On his high shaven skull, a blood-red streak showed like a seam, over a bulging swelling. He mechanically groped for his flattened bowler hat, the contemplation of which served gradually to bring him back to life. The other servant quickly ran for a bowl of tea, which he took in shaking hands and guided unsteadily to his mouth.

Suddenly a lama, fingering his rosary, stood amongst us as if he had sprung from the ground. He wore a sleeveless coat of thick wool over a long, pleated robe, both of dark crimson. A scarf of a lighter red was wound round his shoulders and chest, the long ends falling over his bare arm and being gathered up in his hand. The sinewy arms were long and slender, scarcely tanned by the sun into the yellow-grey tones of old wax, but his flat face was brown and smooth like burnished bronze under a freshly shaven head like a violet tulip. What a contrast these two men were! Father Redbeard in his black gown, his full-blooded Rubenesque face with large round eyes framed by a coppery-red beard and short curly hair, confronting this stolid reserve glinting through narrow, slanting eyes over prominent cheek-bones like oblique contusions at their corners. The sunlight falling on this face made it stand out like a solid violet lump against the dazzling glare of the endless plains, its force lying in the proportion of colour rather than in form. From the jurts of the settlement outside just then blue-robed women came forth with copper milking-vessels and dragged their punctual steps to the tethered mares – for they are accustomed to read the sky,

and to go by the position of the sun. As soon as the milking was over the mares were let loose again and dispersed over the horizon.

While all this went on the lama stood as if rooted to the ground in his clumsy leather boots, fingering the beads of his rosary. The damaged Chinaman rose and stumbled unsteadily to the kitchen while his companion was explaining to the lama about the vanished ponies. The lama shrugged his shoulders and let his gaze search the horizon. It was obvious the ponies had been stolen, saddles and all. With suspicious glances Father Redbeard asked how he had come on the spot so suddenly, and where he had come from. The lama, of course, pointed to the nearest jurt, and said he had had business there, and that being engrossed by the ebullition of Chinese rage we had not noticed his approach.

In these desolate open regions people have a way of appearing suddenly as though they had sprung from the ground. It would seem as if the least movement on the open expanses spread around could not escape one's notice. But Europeans, unfamiliar with these conditions, are always being taken by surprise. The lama then started a long conversation with Father Redbeard about the stolen ponies, the Father growing more and more nervous, while the lama calmly remained a neutral spectator, denying all knowledge of the matter. His dignified appearance and deportment showed this lama to be of high rank, one of the rulers to whom no movement was unknown. By now I guessed all the jurts on the horizon would know about the theft of these ponies; but the lama maintained his attitude of bland ignorance, and was surprised at being asked to have the ponies returned before nightfall. It was easy to sprinkle sand in foreign eyes like ours, and we did not know how to proceed. Had the ponies belonged to Mongols we knew the thieves would not have got far without being caught and cruelly punished. They would be

tethered out in the steppe in wooden stocks with a jug of water, their crime inscribed on a tablet hung on their necks, and left to be devoured by wolves and dogs before many days were over. But the lama seemed not to know of such a thing as horse-theft in this country, or what action was taken by the Mongols when it was a matter of their own ponies. Every Mongol would be able to follow by instinct the tracks of ponies that to us seemed to have vanished into thin air. Even the offer of money for the ponies' return failed to draw, and it was evident we were helpless, and the Chinese no better in this strange country. All was a puzzling mystery which only those native to the soil could unravel; but not the Chinese, who were as much out of place here as trees would be. The very difference in costume showed the gap that separated the mentality of these two nations, sprung from the same root. The Chinese hailed from another region and soil, and had drifted here like tumbleweed, uprooted and rolled along by the gales of autumn, for mile upon mile.

Presently I, too, began to suspect the lama, by reason of his profound ignorance and constant shoulder-shrugging, though he squatted down and seemed inclined for a lengthy discussion of the matter. 'When had we last seen the ponies?' he inquired. The Chinese servant pointed out the position of the sun. Then turning to Father Redbeard the lama asked whether he had faith?

The missionary replied that his faith had nothing to do with the ponies.

The lama assured him it had everything to do with them, for there was an eye clearer than the sky, and purer than the ether, and it was able to search the endless past and future. No mouse, no grain of dust, no blade of grass, could move without the perception of that eye.

'The eye of God,' Father Redbeard replied reverently, and showed his silver cross.

Those narrow prune kernels gave a quick flicker, hardly betraying that they had noted the gesture, as the lama lowered his head sideways and remarked:

'The god I serve, do you not believe that he can see your ponies? For he is the earth. All that we name upon it, is he!' And the lama rose and touched the Father's silver cross. '*Za!*' (beautiful) he ejaculated between his teeth, holding up his thumb in token of admiration. 'Ask it where your ponies are, and tell it to give answer: in this or that direction! And then we can go and fetch them.'

Father Redbeard in his embarrassment passed his hand over his forehead: 'How can it know?'

'Then I will help you by asking my god; he will tell us.' He then gazed up at the sun and over the steppes, fingering his rosary with a running play of the muscles of his lower arms.

'You give us answer concerning the ponies, Noble-born,' I said quickly, as Father Redbeard's face began to darken, 'Where are they?'

Thereupon the lama drew a circle in the sand, knelt down, and placed his face within it murmuring something; and then rose and said as he pointed to the sky: 'When the moon is two hands over the western horizon, they will be here.' Then he turned about and shuffled off towards the native jurts.

'Deceiver,' was all Father Redbeard could say as he looked at the circle and laughed in contempt – adding: 'That would be about three in the morning. That rascal has stolen the ponies, and now wants to make out that I have to thank his ridiculous hocus-pocus for their return.'

'Take him at his word: that is the best you can do, whether you believe in him or not. But a Mongol does believe in this procedure, just as he will disbelieve your "truths" if they cannot be proved to him in deeds. Why give him a form of truth he cannot grasp? Do you believe

his natural superstitions cause him unhappiness? They keep his faith alive, and without faith in something, no man is happy. If you destroy his faith with your only true gospel of salvation, you will, as it were, tear the flesh from his bones. You seek to attract Chinese converts by a promise of land to cultivate, for this is the chief reason of their conversion, while they smile at your teaching which they cannot understand. Endeavour first to convince them along lines suitable to their primitive powers of comprehension. Produce a miracle before their eyes, and they will have faith in you, and in the truths you teach. To you this lama seems a deceiver in his pose of being endowed with superhuman powers by the god he serves, assumed merely to inspire faith. But undermine their temple influence, destroy their horrible superstition, and over these ruins proclaim your "pure truth" not requiring demonstration: it may not lose its value and significance, but it loses all colour and power of attracting such primitive people as these. The beginning of faith lies in that first step. But to proclaim spiritual truths over the ruins of a belief is a deliberate interference in the natural process of development towards maturity, and towards a capacity for deeper perceptions of truth. You try to reason, while the lama enforces his belief through trickery, which to us appears childish. Yet some of these lamas have been trained by rigid discipline towards a type of perfected humanity, the crystallization of their faith being the perception of the unity and oneness of the universe in God, a concentrated, single-pointed perception of the world as unassailably divine. To you the lama's trick seems puerile; but if you were one of this race you would be amazed by it. This is why more credence is given to his teaching than to yours. Alike in their purpose to give man a uniform representation of the cosmos and the tragedy of his own littleness, your teaching is rationalistic, his empiric, and supported by

demonstration. To these simple folk everything is a religious experience, and the necessities of existence develop the soul by means of religion towards an inner freedom, though outwardly burdened and bound by superstition.'

. . . . .

A rapid sunset left the sky flooded with the pale green tints of evening, over which encroaching darkness began to spread its veils. Through the open air-hole of the roof the first stars showed up. Father Redbeard sat on my spare camp bed, sunk in despair at being tricked; or wandered up and down before the jurt studying his gilt-edged prayer book. At supper after a short grace he fell silent, and as soon as the meal was over he asked for some marmalade. Unfortunately I had none to sweeten his bitter mood. During a game of chess, suppressed anger gleamed in his eyes, when his queen was driven into a corner from which there was no escape. He soon pleaded weariness, so we retired and wrapped our blankets about us. I could not sleep. Each time I began to doze, indefinite forms seemed to hover near – at times it was the lama, then Father Redbeard. I woke up to see the latter leaving the jurt. After a while I heard the crackling noise of a tin being cut open, and as I dozed off again was vaguely aware of Father Redbeard's return to his couch. I had hardly reached the verge of a dream when the sawing regularity of his strident breathing awoke me more fully. Through the air-hole overhead the night sky was like a phosphorescent ocean with points of swimming light. Then the whistling noise of wild geese passing low overhead approached, and died away again. They were flying to one of the lakes near by. At night their flight is low, by day they fly in attenuated chains through the bluey heights of space. I rose and went out into the silvery night. The steppe lay very clear in the

moonlight. My cigarette glowed an incredible gold. The jurt was bathed in liquid silver. What was that object on its conical roof, throwing a long, dark shadow? An open tin of marmalade, already surrounded by swarms of ants, fighting, falling, and struggling into the fatal stickiness within. I returned to my couch and wrapped the covering about me, the words of Father Redbeard's grace haunting my brain: 'The bread you eat must be shared with others. Amen. Amen.' That symbol of the spiritual, religious, and moral asset of the flesh introduced between admonitions against dirt and a business stunt in soap! These imported truths of Europe, a trade in weapons; emancipation a business matter; in place of the primitive plough a machine and the rationalistic cry: Have faith in a God whom you no longer honour in the sweat of your brow. . . . The lama was right . . . The lama was a great man. . . . Again Father Redbeard's breathing ceased to be audible and he rose and went out. Then I heard him cough violently and splutter and choke, so I got up and followed him out in time to see him pitch the tin of marmalade far from him in a gleaming curve. His throat was full of ants, I guessed; and then I offered him a cigarette.

The moon hung half-way across its arched path in silvery tranquillity. Why are we not asleep, all thought wiped from our minds, we who are but human beings? We who pride ourselves on our greatness, gazing only into the little circle of our own eyes. We both retired again to sleep, that marmalade tin sailing over the uneasy conscience of my guest, I fear. He was now determined to watch for the reappearance of his ponies, and to find out who brought them. But soon the even tune of his strident sleep resounded again, and I too finally sank at last into oblivion . . . till a regular cropping close by, interrupted now and then by a snort, awoke me. . . . The ponies. . . !

The moon had crept down and hung two hands from the

western horizon, while in the east the sky began to pale into dawn. The Chinese servants had come out too – but too late – to find the ponies grazing peacefully on the spot from which they had disappeared – and they stood amazed at this mysterious return! No sign of anyone about. The ponies' flanks were dry, their breathing calm. Father Redbeard's conscience seemed troubled – that tin of marmalade? . . . and also my unpardonable defence of the lama's tactics? A chasm yawned between us, and he was obviously minded not to enter my jurt again, as he rode into the grey dawn, followed by his two Chinese attendants in their large melon hats, the grotesque fruit of his mission.

The half-empty marmalade tin lay like a discarded accusation a little way off, the nucleus round which another battle of hostile ants was raging, red ones and black ones. In narrow lines they approached on all sides; in thousands their phalanxes engaged each other in the bitter rage of battle. The wounded dragged themselves athwart the lines of fresh supplies moving up with feelers wrathfully erect. Some rose on their hind legs to embrace each other as they met, or to pay each other a compliment as they parted. Occasionally one would beg another for refreshment, and the mouth of the one accosted at once gave off a silver drop which the other drank. Corpses and wounded were being dragged away. The air was permeated by a peculiar acrid, aromatic odour, like rosin and vinegar. I have noticed Mongols place an open hand on a swarm of ants and hold it to their noses, even gathering a few fine grains of ants' earth into their tobacco flasks.

Soon the sun rose, and brought out the flies and little darting sand lizards. And while I was at breakfast the lama came in.

'*Zan-bai-na*,' said he, clenching his fist with thumb erect. Then he squatted down and offered me a pinch from his

tobacco flask. After a pause he remarked that the weather was fine but very dry, that universal formula for opening a conversation.

'Why don't you let it rain?' I asked.

'We are praying for it,' he replied quickly, 'and it will come.'

Then he asked if my friend had got back his ponies.

'Exactly as you foretold,' I said.

'*Za*,' he exclaimed eagerly, between his teeth, sticking his thumb up again. Then he rose, and pointing to his chest said, 'I . . . guru!' . . . and departed, dragging his steps to the other jurts.

But it did not rain yet awhile, though low banks of clouds framed the horizon. Day by day the grass dried up more and more, and even the green patches took on a touch of ochre. When the wind blew from the direction of the lamasery, it brought gusts of tromboning and drumming. They seemed to be praying energetically all day long, till suddenly the sounds grew louder, the heat-veiled atmosphere cleared from minute to minute, and the horizon with its low hills approached as though it could be touched. Colours became unnaturally strong and vivid, and all perspective disappeared. Then clouds crept up and covered the midday sky. Distant thunder began to murmur, and large, single drops hit the roof of my jurt, after which, in a sudden rush, the rain came down, for which there had been so much praying, and poured all night, soaking through the three folds of felt roofing of my jurt. Claps of thunder sounded near and far and in all directions, like rolling echoes, and for long seconds the landscape was illumined by violet lightning.

By noon next day the clouds broke up and a clean-washed sky of deepest silky blue revealed its unending depth. In that short time the grass had grown quite perceptibly, assuming a wonderful green. I noticed that the

steppes were suddenly covered with thousands of lazy, dreamy, blue-black beetles dragging aimlessly along, of a kind I had never seen before. They seemed to have dropped from the skies. When a female was near there was a distinct and conscious acceleration of pace by the males over the blades of young grass which bent under their weight, their bodies leaving a wet trail behind them, while their mailed legs marched mechanically in widespread action, until they sat at rest on the backs of the females, which dragged on in drowsy, aimless lethargy. There was no strife, all was a dim, dreamlike existence of semi-sleep. In a few hours these beetles had vanished as suddenly as they had come, to my astonishment, acting with a precision as at the word of command.

A few days afterwards a new member was added to my household. On one of my rides not far from home I discovered a young vulture fledgeling, still almost naked. At my approach he opened his broad beak unbelievably wide at its chrome-yellow corners, and let me look down his enormous gullet. He lay quite helpless, and when I lifted him made no resistance. He already weighed about five or six pounds. I took him back and bedded him down on a piece of felt in the corner of my jurt, where he lay for some weeks without moving. As he made no attempt to stand up I thought he might be ill; if lifted up, he immediately lay down again and bent his neck far back so that his triangular almost bald head seemed to be growing out of his back. At the call of his name, 'Joseph,' he threw his head sideways, opened his beak into a wide receptacle into which large bits of meat sank straight down. Food was his one passionate interest in life. He gobbled and swallowed till his crop was like a well-packed sack. If meat was laid before him he snapped it up, threw it high, and caught it in his open beak. But however hungry he was he never touched the flesh or entrails of fowls, and turned away from

such with disgust. When taken into the sun he evinced the greatest satisfaction, spreading wide his wings, on which hard white bristles had begun to sprout, and he would lie in the sand for hours with legs outstretched, open beak, and closed eyes. After a month he began to drink water and swallow broken bones. He grew rapidly in size and his feathers came, rusty-red on his breast, and brownish-black on the tail and wings, showing a hard, metallic glint, and under the wings an ashen-grey. He knew his name and came to it in long, hopping strides, his horny legs, grey-green and blue, protruding from feathered trousers, with his long. flapping wings sweeping the ground in a most ungainly fashion; in this way he wore down his wing-feathers into stubbly grey brooms. I tried by every means possible to one who could not do it himself, to teach Joseph to fly. Lifting him on to the roof I placed myself a little distance away, and called him. He spread his wings, reared his body up, made one or two clumsy attempts to take off, and then gave up the attempt. I swung my arms in my endeavours to replace the regal example of a mother bird – more I could not do, and Joseph watched me with apparent contempt and sorrow. From the first few days of his domicile in my jurt he acknowledged me as his master, and was shy or vexed if a stranger approached to feed him, till his legs could carry him and his feathers sprouted, when he grew aggressive in his attack on all who dared approach, hacking at them with his beak, and prancing about in fury with outstretched wings. He once beat my Chinese servant about the ears till he was stunned, and the man carefully avoided Joseph ever after. Dogs were treated in the same way, as with open beak and the venomous eyes of a snake he slapped at them right and left.

At last he really seemed minded to fly. When the wind swept across the steppe he faced it in majestic pose, unfolding his huge wings, all but pushing off, but did not leave

the ground. I stood beside him swinging my arms and hopping – doing little more than imitate his vain efforts. One day I again placed him on the roof of the hut, the highest point of our surroundings, and then called to him. He flapped his wings until a sudden gust of wind lifted him up, but only to flounder and fall head downwards to earth. That was his last attempt to fly, and in justice to his human name he never learnt the art. After that when sitting on the roof, if called, he would only stretch out his neck, but never unfolded his wings. The birds that hovered above him he ignored with contempt. His only mode of progression was to walk or hop. Once I took him to a carcass not far away, hoping that a nearer acquaintance with others of his own breed would teach him what apparently he could not teach himself. I retired to about two hundred yards away and lay down to watch. Two dogs came, but Joseph, enthroned on the carcass, soon put them to flight. No vulture approached, though several swung in proud spirals overhead. Then the experiment ended in an unexpected way, for a flock of rascally ravens suddenly fell upon poor Joseph and attacked him from all sides; scolding and cawing they hacked at him quicker than he could defend himself. I ran and lifted him to my shoulder. He was puffing with open beak, his eyes a flaming protest. But the ravens paid scant respect to my protective presence, and followed us with loud and rude cries, imparting a peck here and there to my protégé, and flying so close overhead that I could hear the air whistling through their feathers. Joseph's eyes spewed wrath, as he ducked and almost lost his balance on my shoulder. As long as I was obliged to keep Joseph indoors, in his young stage of gobbling and reclining, I myself lived almost entirely outside, for he exuded such a repulsive odour that one's senses reeled. In spite of every kind of cleansing process his body emitted an unbearable stench of decomposition. Only the lama, who

since the pony-theft was a frequent visitor, inspecting my pictures with the frankness of a buyer, curving his hands and looking through them like an expert – only he seemed immune to this awful smell. He could sit for hours on the ground in silence consuming a kettle full of tea, stirring it with his fingers; and then bending his head respectfully out of the hut, between his cups, to blow his nose with those same fingers! He tried in vain to befriend Joseph, his juiciest pieces of meat being refused. Joseph's affection was monogamic, and his feathers rose each time the lama approached with ingratiating chuckles. Cautiously and apparently quite disinterestedly the lama asked me about Father Redbeard, and about the teaching of our Churches. He knew the names of Jesus, and Mohammed, but little else. In explaining things to him I had continually to compare priests with lamas, churches with temples, our saints with Yeketarnitsi, Padma Sambawa Baksi, the apostles with Tsok-Dzalidab-Khour-Laksam, Luther's reformation of the old Church with the creation of the Geluppas or Virtue-Sect of Tzon-Khapé in the fifteenth century. The similarity of comparison for each occurrence was amazing. Always the same procedure, only the fashion of outer expression differing according to the periods of culture, mystic experience being always the same, using different outer expressions of detail. The whole flaming fantasy of Asia and its great art became apparent in these talks. Apart from its scriptures all colour, each pictorial representation and detail was symbolic. Primitive and genuine contemplation of nature produced in human souls tidal waves of mystical perception and expression. The demons, and peaceful divinities were the symbols in colour and form for recording unspeakable mysteries. I asked how many were able to understand symbol as such, without making the representation the object of fear and reverence? The lama replied, only the

very few, and these can be compared to the ripened fruit that falls from the tree of its own accord. He who can understand the spirit and original truth, underlying religions, has practically ceased to be a man, because for him the empiric curtain falls away through which the senses are led, by experience, to grope towards perception. That is the boundary of human thought where experience reaches the dead point, behind which the dawn of the inexpressible begins. Only he who can view the world of being to its utmost limits stands on the summit of highest perception, the result of his empiric existence.

How true, I thought, are the words of this lama! His wise sayings coincided with my trend of thought. He knew little of the world beyond his own narrow circle; he had never seen a flying machine, or a railway train, or a ship; a telephone or a wireless receiver; knew nothing of all the things that are dismembering our world; yet his wisdom was all-comprehensive because it included the world-picture as a whole, with the force of primitive individual vision. All that he had not seen, all that might confuse his faith . . . what, after all, did it amount to? A conquest of the air? The possibility of lifting a man mechanically into a sphere into which he had not been physically fitted by nature to soar? The annihilation of distances? We count all these things as marvels of human achievement, and hold, in our one-sided view, that all things are now becoming possible for us. The tower having neared the clouds, man believes himself able to outwit God and Nature . . . by becoming a god himself!

. . . . .

From a visit to Dolo-nor, the chief town of inner Mongolia, I brought back a new silk robe and presented it to the lama. Beaming with pleasure, he at once put it on over his old

one, and immediately proceeded to soil it by wiping the grease off his fingers on bib and cuffs, after eating a fat piece of mutton, and by letting the fat drip on it recklessly. To my question, why he soiled his robe so deliberately, he answered that the wearer of a new robe must show that he has eaten well. In such manner the new garment was inaugurated, having seemed of little value to its owner without these signs of use. Its freshness was for some reason distasteful to him.

In course of conversation he informed me that the lamasery belonged to one of those rare sects in which the cult of Yoga held an important if not exclusive part. Yoga is practised more or less in every religion in some form of natural meditation, the Yogis thereby acquiring control of the psychical process of personality, its animal instincts and inhibitions, and turning it into a perfect harmonious tool for the soul which must become ruler over every bodily experience and feeling, and transcend its natural condition. This state may be compared to times of intense prayer and ecstasy, in which a person will kneel for hours on a hard stone floor without being aware of inconvenience. The postures of the body were very numerous, certain ones being peculiar to particular sects and schools. These were all practised as a help towards enlightenment, and the mystic union of man with God. The power to leave the body, levitation, being able to make oneself lighter or heavier, to go everywhere, to adopt any shape or form desired; any value in such powers lay in enhancing the subjective spiritual state of the individual – this state being a separate inner experience unconnected with concrete things. Consciousness, when it becomes human, wraps itself in fine garments in which are interwoven the fourteen chief nerves and many thousand minor ones, that are divided into the Eastern and Western system, similar but unrelated. The fourteen chief nerves again are the outlets

of the three great nerve streams. The middle nerve in the spinal column is the source of all physical forces of the human body. It is flanked to right and left by the two other nerve streams which cross over the spine and each other in a serpentine line curving to right and left respectively (like the caduceus of Mercury). At the point where both nerves cross the spinal column, a centre of power is generated by the contact of two opposed tensions. The points where the three chief nerves meet form the different life-centres. The common root from which they spring at the base of the spine is the first centre, the generative powers lie at the second point, the navel at the third, the heart at the fourth centre, the thorax at the fifth, and the spot between the eyes above the nose (the third eye) is the sixth and last point of contact from where the three nerve streams spread out into the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain. If the left and right nerves are to be thought of as branching into the brain, the stem of the middle one rises in a straight upward line to the point at the top of the tonsure where the seam of the skull joint runs, at which point at death the triumphant consciousness should leave its body. This multi-petalled lotus is the symbol of the brain, of the highest and most subtle part of the human body, in which all the conscious processes of the psyche are located. Hence the prayer: 'O thou holy jewel in the lotus.' Hence the symbolic lotus petals on which Buddha and all holy or divine figures are enthroned – showing that all is dependent on the psyche. The most common pose assumed in pictures and statues by high divinities and saints, sitting with legs crossed, body erect, and arms resting on bent knees, is pure Yoga; one of the many postures by which contemplation and abstraction are furthered. The lower part of the body and its functions fed from the common base of the three nerve streams are at rest, to the advantage of the upward flow of vital power – also called the serpent power,

because it is said to be curled up like a serpent in the centre at the base of every human body. The psychic power, encouraged to awaken by this position, rises up the nerve of the spinal column, like mercury in a thermometer, till it reaches the brain, and radiates from there in a shower of illumination enveloping the whole person in its radiance, like water spraying from a perpetual fountain. All these Yoga poses and castigations, which are manifold and strange, are merely done to produce by posture and muscular relaxation or tension the condition of slumber or suspension of organic functioning, so that the power thus freed accrues to the benefit of the psyche.

This cult of Yoga is partly contained in writing by these sects, but many of the practices are only passed on orally to the elect in the inner circle. Moreover, the written instructions are more or less meaningless and misleading to those who do not possess the orally given key that unlocks their mysteries. In each monastery there are only a few who are chosen, after long and careful observation and testing, as worthy of this knowledge. My lama friend would only give superficial and evasive answers to all my careful questions, and evaded explanation, as this was usually conducted through the interpretation of the black Mongol Simon. Outwardly very devout before the lama, he was inwardly tainted by Soviet influences, and I often felt that the lama did not like conversing with me through this medium, partly because he could not control the rendering given me, and partly because he could gauge the Mongol and did not think highly of him. Simon was a renegade, and showed it by wearing Russian boots and a military cap with the Soviet star. He prided himself that by wearing this emblem he had adopted a foreign race. At times when I asked the lama through Simon for the explanation of some demon, he would purposely give evasive answers, making statements which in his next visit, if Simon happened to be

absent, he would contradict. I realized it was hopeless as an outsider to try to penetrate to the soul of a race, expressed in symbols that were as strange and curious as their own appearance. But I realized that their pictorial representations embodied a wealth of imagination beyond my boldest expectation.

I tried to bribe the lama to show me some of their secret writings, but in vain. He was strictly orthodox and correct; moreover, there was a very severe control in such matters, the monks having a system of secret spying on each other, from which even those of high standing were not exempt. And when their conclave decreed the punishment of some offending lama, the monastery police dealt out this punishment with a right good will. It consisted of tying up the culprit and beating him with a stick, and there were all sorts of other tortures; one being to weigh down the sitting offender with heavy blocks of wood representing the holy scriptures, if he had been careless in reading them.

Periodical examinations of their students were held in the open courtyard outside the temple. There they all sat, clad in heavy saffron-coloured cloaks, rows of chattering merry youths, while the examiners paced along, stopping here and there broad-legged before the students, throwing up their arms with swinging rosary, clapping their hands together loudly, and shouting out some question to the sitter: 'What is the highest wisdom?' And the sitter answered or not according to the simplicity or difficulty of the question put to him. Often he would consult with a neighbour, to the edification and self-esteem of the examiner. Questions were sometimes suggested to the latter in a whisper by those standing near; at others his long ears caught up a question circulating elsewhere, above the din of chattering voices that filled the courtyard, for each was trying to overshout the others, stamping, swinging his arms, and clapping his hands. They were all seething and bubbling

over with much wisdom, a medley of high-spirited children turning these examinations into a pandemonium. Some worked themselves up to such a feverish pitch that the stream of their wisdom gushed foaming from their lips.

On these occasions, when examinations were to be held, the supervising lamas rounded every inmate of the monastery into the court where the address and examination was to take place, and then stood or sat at the entrance gates to prevent any from leaving should his more evil impulses incline that way. The rest of the settlement lay silent and deserted in the midday sun, pervaded by the distant buzz of chattering voices as though the geese of the sleeping Capitol were cackling at the approach of a stranger.

My lama friend lived in one of the little adjoining yards enclosed in mud walls about six or seven feet high, of which there are always so many that, viewed from a distance, each lamasery looks as if it were surrounded by a lot of open boxes. I was once able to visit him in his dwelling during one of these examinations, as he happened to be off duty and all the other courts were practically deserted; so there would be little fear of eavesdroppers who came in everywhere unannounced to satisfy their curiosity. In his dwelling there was an altar, small, very clean and tidy, a few cushions covered in red, and a low lacquered table only a few inches high, also in red. With a friendly gesture of welcome, he handed me a cushion and invited me to sit down, placed two porcelain bowls on the ground, and went to his jurt in the middle of the yard to fetch a blackened kettle from which he poured out tea. Offering me his snuff flask he inquired after my health, and asked what the weather was like in my country at this time of year. Each time I had to describe to him afresh how people were dressed in Europe; and the priests, these especially interested him. Were they just like the man with the red beard whose ponies had vanished recently? Then he asked

me for three cigarettes, to my surprise, for lamas of high rank do not smoke. But he laid them wide apart and parallel on the ground, asked me for one more, which he placed before the three. Then pointing respectively to each of the three he said, 'Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus.' Then he drew a line from each to the single cigarette, adding, 'Different ways to the same goal!' Then he rose and returned the cigarettes impregnated with his wisdom. But there seemed to be a connection between this little demonstration and Father Redbeard, the mention of whose name had given the lama this idea of the cigarette symbol, a demonstration suitable for primary school children. Possibly it had been Father Redbeard's invention which the lama repeated in the light of his own wisdom to me, politely showing the spiritual connection of differing religions. When had Father Redbeard and he exchanged these ideas? For as far as I knew Father Redbeard had not visited the neighbourhood since the pony episode, and the lama had certainly not left it. Were my suspicions about Father Redbeard visiting the monastery not without foundation when he took the attitude of seeing through and deprecating the lama's game, and of the temple encouraging and exploiting the superstition of a people sunk in a quagmire of ignorance for its own advantage with the same egotism which enables each lama to keep his authority, even if he lead a dissolute life? Father Redbeard's desire to spread Christianity in a rationalistic and merely external form was, it seemed to me, because he no longer believed in it himself. Fanaticism was a bloodless outer substitute for a living faith that had ceased to exist, and fought for the form as such, though it was no longer aware of a Presence to worship and extol. The missionary's European vanity and conscience were unable to avoid the pitfalls of prejudice.

I put cautious questions to the lama as to whether he had ever seen Father Redbeard again. These he parried as

cautiously, making the vague statement that Father Redbeard was a good man. Which statement I took away with me as one of two great enigmas to ponder over. For as I was leaving, the lama begged me to choose some gift from his belongings, no matter what. In the yard on the back wall a pen had been partitioned off with strong wooden boards. On my arrival, to my great astonishment I beheld, caged up in this, a great Tibetan sheep dog, a perfect specimen, such as I had never seen amongst the mangy mongrels hereabouts. He was like a great black St. Bernard, long-haired and shaggy, with a white waistcoat, and he had the huge, intelligent head of a lion. Had I met him in the open I would certainly have made a wide detour, for I knew how savage dogs could be out here, and had learned to avoid them. They do not fear man as they know his flesh so well from corpses, fighting the wolves for their share. But as this hound was penned in, I approached to have a better look at him. As I came near he rose on his hind legs and whined in a most friendly fashion, asking to be caressed through the bars. He stood as tall as myself. Tentatively I approached my hand and laid it on his broad forehead, at which he closed his eyes and put his head sideways, giving himself up to my caress. I had seldom met such need for affection in a strange animal, and yet for some surprising and mysterious reason this gentle creature was caged in. I now asked the lama about this dog: he was called Gaesar, and was a present, he told me, from a Tibetan friend who had been staying at the monastery, but since his master had left, the dog was like another animal, broody, and ready to attack any and everyone who came near. Stones, sticks, or whip were of no avail. He flew at all other dogs, bowled them over, and broke their necks. Some of the Mongols had very nearly shared the same fate. At night the trap-door leading to the open country was drawn up by a cord attached near

the door of the lama's dwelling – quite a cunning device.

When I told the lama how friendly the dog had been to me, he was amazed. So I went to the kennel. At once the great hound jumped up against the bars and whined and moaned, giving me his paw. He was a splendid fellow, with wrinkles of loose flesh about his slanting, triangular eyes and full mouth, tilted up to a point under his nose. No doubt he could be alarming, but at present he only desired to be petted, pressing his nose through the staves so that the lips were pushed back and showed his strong teeth. The lama looked on full of distrust, fearful that the dog might break out of his pen, and drew me back into his dwelling. I begged him to give me this dog; but he brushed aside my request quickly; he did not trust that show of friendliness to me, though the dog behaved very differently to anyone else, growling savagely. Also he only ate human corpse flesh, and would touch no other food thrown into his pen. Nor would he touch the carcasses of animals, the lama assured me. As soon as a human death occurred in the vicinity, the dog grew restless, sniffing at his bars for hours and howling. When let free at night he ran straight to where the corpse had been exposed. By dawn he was always back in his kennel. Mongols are very accurate in their observation of animals. On my further questions, the lama told me of a horoscope that he had made which, though quite fragmentary, gave indications that the dog was possessed by some sort of Gandhara or human consciousness, which, instead of wandering in the between-stages after death, had sunk into the body of this dog at the moment of dying, to continue its life therein. But the horoscope ceased at one of the approaching new moons, and the lama presumed that this dog would die a violent death probably through a human hand, and would accompany a human soul in its wandering. I

began to understand the psychology of the lama's fear of his dog which lived on human corpse flesh. This fact made him think the dog, in its animal instinctive way, was striving to join the human species, and in killing his own kind by hundreds, indicated a super-animal complex which filled him with hatred of his own kind in general, a subconscious spirit of destruction taking possession of and using the force of this animal form.

I took my leave of the lama, and he was in the act of accompanying me across the yard when suddenly the great hound, freed as by a miracle, came bounding towards us. I saw a look of terror on the lama's face as, gathering up his robe, he sprang back into the door of his house, and shouted to me to follow, but too late. The dog sprang up at me with such impetus that I staggered under the weight of his forepaws on my shoulders. I laid my arms round his neck, to push him off if necessary, but the dog only whined and shoved a friendly nose into my face, licking it with his warm tongue. Turning to avoid this stormy caress, I saw the horrified stare of the lama over the half-open red shutter of his window. The dog wagged his bushy tail and jumped and pranced round me, barking and inviting me to play, in a voice that reverberated like thunder in the narrow yard. I went to his kennel, but my intention seemed like a stroke of the whip after all his friendliness, and with hanging head and tail he slunk in a curve round me, in begging protest against being shut up. The door was intact, but the dog had dug under the partition and squeezed out that way. He might have done this before, it struck me, but his desire to be with me had fired him to think of and carry out his liberation. I returned to him and laid my hand on his great, sorrowful head, and he licked my hand. Then our eyes met and held each other, but the lama was waving me to go, and as I went along the road from the monastery to my jurt, this

dog Gaesar bounded round me in unbridled joy. In such curious circumstances did I acquire what was possibly the most devoted friend of my life! He followed me wherever I went as though to protect me! Unfortunately, as soon as a Mongol approached the dog's hair rose, the slanting pleat over his eyes tilted ominously, and I had to lock him into the jurt till the danger of his doing harm was over. My servants dared not go near him, and as soon as Simon, the black Mongol, appeared on the horizon with the pony, he began to shout to warn me. That was the only disadvantage in my new possession! The rumour soon spread, and visits to me grew rare, to the disadvantage of my work, though the dog also kept off many an unwelcome intruder, impelled by idle curiosity. His dislike of Mongols was strange. Even after weeks of acquaintance with my servants his attitude remained threatening. Towards the Chinese I managed to instil an artificial neutrality, but to Simon he always showed his dislike by a savage growl. The lama never came near me after Gaesar had adopted me. If I wanted to go out without the dog, I had to lock him in my jurt, for I feared mischief as soon as he was out of my sight. This dread began to be an obsession, as I always dreaded that he might again dig his way out. Who could withstand such a dog and his infernal strength of attack? A great responsibility rested on me. Joseph now lived only on the roof of the jurt, after several differences of opinion between him and Gaesar, leading to a resigned neutrality between them. Each thought himself greater than the other. Gaesar did not touch the food we gave him – I have never seen him eat. As soon as night set in he vanished, to return at earliest dawn. I often meant to follow him on my pony, but always missed the moment. He knew how to elude me, and the goal of his nocturnal escapades was never disclosed. I tried to starve him by tying him up at night. But he always got free, and the next morning lay

sound asleep beside the torn rope – a strange animal indeed! If only he could have told what was going on in his mind. At times he was gloomy and sad, then suddenly he would spring up against me, whining and burying his great head in me, and seeming to weep. But such moments did not last long, and after that he would again sink into gloomy brooding. One morning Gaesar had an open red wound on his leg, at which he licked all day long. He must have got it during the night – wolves perhaps, for there were no dogs left that dared come near him. The next night I locked Gaesar into the jurt. He was quiet until ten o'clock, when he started to whine and got restless till, sitting on his haunches, he threw up his head and howled in long and dismal wails, penetrating to the bone! I tried to comfort him, but he broke out again into this wail, starting with a whine. When I got up, he ran to the door and began to scratch. I opened it and ran out, and a shadow seemed to flit into the night as Gaesar rushed out, bounded away, and was gone in a moment. There was a new moon, and the steppe sank at a short distance into darkness. What could that shadow have been? Some animal, if I was not mistaken. By the morning Gaesar lay sound asleep before the jurt as usual. The next night I locked him in again, and again at ten he started the same business, and again I saw the shadow flit away. The next night Simon lay watching in a neighbouring jurt. I had hardly let out Gaesar when Simon appeared. He had seen distinctly how a large lean wolf had cautiously approached the jurt as soon as Gaesar began to howl, and had even given tongue once or twice. Gaesar did not return the next morning, and stayed away some days. No one had seen the great Tibetan hound. The fourth day when I came home, Gaesar was lying in the jurt, thin, dusty, and weary. He hardly seemed the same dog; his greeting was languid; and the unhealed wound on his leg was very red. Every hair

of his coat showed traces of the change. What had happened to him? He slept all day like the dead. About ten at night he grew restless and wanted to go out. I comforted him, but even under my touch he began to howl so miserably that I gave it up. A sudden shot fell outside, with a glassy hiss. Gaesar cocked his ears, and then threw himself like one possessed against the door. I opened it and he tore out. Simon then came towards me with a long Russian military rifle – we should surely find the body in the morning. This was somehow connected with Gaesar. I began inwardly to curse the Mongol for playing this trick. He should not have done it, for it was probably no wolf, but a wild bitch. However, the Mongol wouldn't hear of it – he knew the difference between a dog and a wolf! At grey dawn the next morning I stood on the steppe with my field-glasses. No Gaesar was to be seen. We looked for the spot where the supposed wolf had been shot. Simon soon found its track, with a joyous exclamation of 'There, didn't I say so!' He was kneeling on the ground. A short track began from there and suddenly stopped, and search as we would in all directions, we could not find it again. All day we searched the plains on our ponies for a wounded animal, and observed ravens and vultures, usually the safest finger-posts to a dead body, but found nothing. Gaesar did not appear. A week passed – had I lost him for good, and must I let the grass grow on his memory? The second week passed. Over the steppe the slender rib of a new moon stood on its low curve. No Gaesar. The steppe seemed to have swallowed him. Perhaps his wound had given him fever and caused his end? Perhaps in his misery he preferred to die away from me? My faithful friend . . . I thought of him often, with a sad heart. He left a gap in me, though all the others were glad to be rid of him – Simon no longer had to shout from the edge of the horizon to get the dog secured, and they could all

move about unhindered. I went to the monastery to see if he had gone back there. No sign of him there. The lama sat as before in his room, the wooden shutters open. It was unusually hot and dusty. A figure came across the yard with a peculiar gait that seemed vaguely familiar – a lama in red like all the others – but his skull was unnaturally pale and rosy. My lama friend quickly rose and went out, at which the other at once covered his head with his scarf and rapidly moved away . . . Where could I have seen that man? My thoughts searched in every direction. Urga? Dolo-nor? Kalgan? All the long way home to my jurt, while my pony trotted slowly, I struggled to recall some memory, stirred by that curious figure. It was like a vivid dream that always eludes one's hold – bald – pale and rosy – where had I seen that face? – but the picture eluded me each time I tried to tackle it.

Now the rainy season would soon begin; the flies were ravenous, and the clouds overhead assumed a steely blue tone. The evening was unnaturally still and overcast. Joseph, asleep on the roof, seemed to be headless. The neighbourhood was desolate, for the settlement of jurts had moved on to some other grazing ground. One could see the spots of worn grass where they had stood, and the two posts to which the milking mares had been tethered. All else was gone. I too began to think of leaving.

Sitting on my camp bed and dozing . . . how sultry the heat was . . . Suddenly a piercing scream rang across from the steppe – or was I dreaming again! I bounded to the door – a frightened pony was galloping madly over the ground. Simon's! And behind it, in a dusty cloud, a dark mass of black and Simon's orange-yellow coat. 'Gaesar!' I shouted, snatched up a rifle, and ran towards the spot shouting, 'Gaesar! Gaesar!' But the hound did not heed me, and oh, how slowly I seemed to advance. Before the kitchen jurt the Chinese stood gazing. 'Gaesar! Gaesar!'

Too late! A hundred paces away the dog let go his victim, and with his tail between his legs was about to slink away – I lifted the rifle – a yard too short! The next shot threw the dog round, and I put in one more. Simon lay on the ground with a terrible wound under his chin, from which his life-blood spurted. In his clenched hands he held tufts of black fur and grass, his eyes stared brokenly, and wherever one trod blood . . . blood . . . Too late, too late! Black Simon's end! Not far from his corpse lay the lean, stiff body of a female wolf, with a wound and fur dried round it in sleek polish, like that of a top hat – the old wound made by Simon's shot! And further away lay Gaesar killed by my bullets! But their souls wandered together towards the thin pale streak of the new moon left in the daylight sky. I – the guru, fulfiller of destiny.

High above, a few eagles sailed in majestic curves across the bright sky . . . that curious figure that I had seen . . . bald and pale, with that ungainly walk in the new red robe . . . in a flash I knew – it was Father Redbeard, the lama!

PART IV

URGA AGAIN

In the late afternoon of July the fifteenth, we brought our *troika* to a halt, about four miles from Urga. Before us the wooden roofs of the houses and jurts of the town lay in the rosy light of sunset, with the golden roofs of the monastery of Galdan reared high above, while yet further away the roofs of the Sharsum monastery blazed in the rays of the sinking sun like fire. Confronting us the dark forest-clad mass of Bogdo-Ool lay like a huge tiger stretched full length on the undulating waves of the steppes, under the delicate green shadows of the evening sky, spread like the meshes of a silken web. Our ponies were thoroughly spent, for we had pushed on with all possible speed, hoping to get through the dreaded custom-house of Urga before sundown. I patted their heaving flanks with regret as they drooped and panted round me, for it was, after all, too late to enter the town. So once more we unfolded our tents for the night, hoping with sunrise to be the first to enter the palisaded enclosure of the customs-yard, and get quickly through that tedious ordeal.

In spite of great fatigue, my dreams were overshadowed by this customs inspection we again had to pass, for I found myself standing before a medieval tribunal of the Inquisition. With malicious grins my judges found fault with each object in my possession. Every paint-brush, each tube of paint, each cartridge, weighed down the scales in my disfavour. With a start of relief I awoke, and like an

animal I crawled from under the tent flap into the open air. Wide, undulating plains spread before me like a black rigid ocean that stretched away into a darkness festooned with bright stars, hung low on the horizon and gleaming at me like lanterns. A thunderstorm was gathering, great black clouds slid up from the west over the wide face of the midnight sky, like ships with sails full spread, blotting out those star lamps. On the distant horizon lightning flashed from the black moving hulks, and a sudden breeze played over the grass, and the hairs of my fur coat. The only sound in the nocturnal silence was the regular cropping of the grazing ponies close by. I crept back again into the tent and into its acrid smell of charred cow dung and biting smoke, so familiar after my two years' journey through Asia.

Within this tent lamas had squatted in the dim yellow light – red lamas and yellow ones – giving vent to their feelings against the Russians who were remodelling young Mongolia, which now wore the red star of the Soviet on its pointed caps, and moved clumsily up and down on bent riding-legs to the sergeants' commands: '*Rras, dwa drrri*'; who stamped about in rows and lines, carried out formations, and shouted the 'International' with full lung force when marching to their dirty barracks. Where had those that embodied the spirit of this vast pasture-land, with its cruelty and contempt of life, gone? Perhaps they had disintegrated! Life here on the steppes runs a quick course, is soon broken, leaving but a skull in place of a full stop at the end of its tale. Some of the old ones may yet sit behind prison walls, telling their beads with gaze turned inwards, awaiting the last act in the shape of a Russian bullet, to put them face to face with final truth in the intermediate world. Amongst them there had been a Tshal-Lama, a monster of bloodthirsty cruelty, who painted the devices on his field-standard with the blood of slaughtered Chinese.

Here, in my tent, he had leaned against the tent pole, evading the earthly vengeance that sought him, and sipping tea from a silver-lined skull, which he held to his lips in both hands, with closed eyes, as though still drinking the brain of his victims. Joseph the vulture had also been of the company, greedily swallowing warm lumps of meat down his coarse-haired gullet, and emitting a very evil odour. It was in this tent that the black Mongol 'Simon' lay after Gaesar had torn his throat.

Now drops of rain drummed upon the tent roof in a rapid *crescendo*, turning into the deluge of a heavy thunderstorm.

The next morning a clear sun rose upon a world of moist grass-land, with a string of bullock-carts passing at a slow walk, while we busily folded our tents, packed all upon the cart, and then trotted and jolted briskly towards the town. At the Tola-bridge we found another string of bullock-carts creeping along, that must have passed us before daylight. The drivers turned the bullocks' heads away from us to enable us to pass, but their own weather-tanned faces were turned to us in a dull, uncomprehending stare. These curious human creatures, with their bovine eyes, and mouths only used for feeding, in their faded sun-bleached shirts, and ankle-tied trousers, wielding long whips – how many times must they have crawled thus with their carts over this bridge to Urga, growing more and more like the oxen they drive? On their journeys, that often last for months, they hardly ever talk; they simply plod along in the even monotony of alternating day and night.

We approached the first cluster of jurts, surrounded by sand and dust. Empty kerosene and petrol tins were piled up against their walls, some old and rust-eaten, others new and gleaming like silver; they are the wealth and pride of this nomadic race, for these tins are not only useful but 'beautiful,' because they come from Europe. Between the

posts to which their ponies were tethered, strings of little prayer-banners were strung. Europe and Russia have not yet found a substitute, apparently, for these prayer-banners, or maybe they are old and worn-out rubbish that needs no replacing, for was not Russia hot and eager to give these people a communistic paradise for which they had no desire or need, while, with its fiery breath, it annihilated their Church?

As we reached the first palisade I noticed large, conspicuous placards in Russian, very important-looking, though quite incomprehensible to the Mongols. These bore the Moscow proclamation:

> Russian women!
> Down with false shame!
> Bear children without fear. .
> The commune will undertake
> All further responsibility and turn them
> Into worthy burghers.

Having destroyed the Church, all moral sense must also be destroyed, theoretically to rise again like a phœnix in new splendour from the ashes of the past. But only in theory, of course, for the bonfires were devouring human morals entirely. What was the use of these senseless placards in Urga, where their meaning was as unintelligible as the language in which they were printed? Had the Russian colony increased so greatly of late? Were these placards part of the propaganda of the immigrating Russians, carrying many a sanction and serving the wishes and demands of the proletariat?

On the journey hither my interpreter one day informed me suddenly that two new cossack battalions had come to the barracks in Urga, and that towards the east the 'air was thickening.' How had he come by his information?

Had he read it in the staring eyes of Chinese bullock-drivers? It is one of the many mysteries of this vast Mongolia, as of Asia generally, how news travels, especially Job's news, even reaching people who squat in the centre of a God-forsaken desert.

. . . . .

We soon reached the place that had seemed so distant the night before, and guided our *troika* through wide gates into an enclosure, where last night's thunderstorm had left shallow pools of muddy water. A few dingy, rain-sodden jurts were distributed irregularly about this hopelessly untidy square, enclosed by a palisade about ten feet high. Unfortunately we were not the first arrivals, for a caravan of over a hundred bullock-carts had preceded us that morning, or possibly the night before, being left to stand over by the lazy and incompetent officials. Behind this medley of carts and dazed and dozing oxen, I noticed a car with luggage piled high upon it, and covered with a yellow tarpaulin, and just then Stanislav Wassilivitch appeared from a jurt with an oily overall in one hand and a pair of Russian boots in the other. His face, with its small cruel eyes, the vertical line between his eyebrows, and stiff-brushed moustache, was repellent, though he always tried to be helpful, or at least to appear so. He was well known in these parts, though no one could give any definite information about him. By birth a German, he had been in Russia from his earliest youth; his own language half forgotten, he yet spoke Russian with the typical German accent, and when he attempted to speak German it was a translated Russian. During my stay at Urga he paid me an occasional visit under the cloak of friendship, but no doubt also kept an eye on me, for I felt instinctively on guard before those cruel little eyes, restless and nervous,

prying and persistent, like flies on a hot summer's day.

Here he was once more, offering me his help. He had arrived the day before, and was stuck here with his car, for the especial interests of Stanislav Wassilivitch did not seem to coincide with those of the customs officers, whom he described as a lot of cattle and boasted of smuggling strychnine from China to Mongolia under their noses. He was a chauffeur by profession, but he had insinuated himself into Mongolian quarters as a denouncer of forbidden goods, and from this he drew his chief profit and interest. He had accounted for several human lives, but this fact did not seem to weigh against him, since he was licensed to shoot such game. His friends knew him by the nickname of the 'Sausagemaker.' The fact of his present hold-up and delay he took with the usual Russian 'Nitchivo.' Arm-in-arm we entered one of the jurts, where we found two grubby Mongols in Russian boots, and leather straps girded alarmingly tight around their waists. They were busy drinking tea and talking, and took scant notice of us beyond a hasty glance. So I held my passport and permit to enter (which needed but a signature) under the nose of one of them until he at last took the papers and began to read them. Just when I thought all was settled, another Mongol entered, with a suspicious glance in my direction, and with the word '*Mutchu*' (not known) my papers were given back to me. The first attempt had miscarried. Stanislav Wassilivitch, however, was not daunted, and appealed to the Mongols' non-existing honour! But it took many persuasive words to induce one of them to rise. After much discussion, however, one of them did get up. He carefully packed the bowl of his pipe into his tobacco pouch, wrapped its string round the thin stem, and came out, followed by us. Taking no notice of our vehicles, he went straight across to another jurt. Stanislav Wassilivitch

called to him that he had passed the carts, but without turning his head the Mongol said, 'Pony,' and went on. We waited near our carts for a considerable time before he reappeared, mounted now on his steed of office. Stanislav Wassilivitch was profuse with thanks as he patted the pony's neck and praised its beauty (which I tried in vain to discover). This saved the situation, and the Mongol rode off to sign the paper in the official jurt. I followed him, and, armed at last with my paper, I returned to Stanislav Wassilivitch and thanked him for his help and lucky hit. He gave me his hand, pushed his linen cap awry on his narrow head, and repeated that these people were oxen, and there was no need of thanks.

We took our *troika* out of the customs-yard as quickly as possible, thankful to be quit of these officials before they could change their minds, and drove round the outer part of the town, for I had decided to return to my former quarters in what had once been the Swedish mission.

I found the place much as before, only if possible a little more dilapidated. Within the house all was more or less under water, and what was left of the ceiling-paper hung down in large wet shreds. Hail had perforated the paper over the windows, and the figures I had painted on the wall were torn and spoilt; while in the chinks between the flooring-planks grass was sprouting. Yet, uninviting as this place was, it had one great advantage, it was no longer infested by vermin – which had retired to more thickly populated quarters. This was sufficient inducement for me, and by putting up the tent inside, one could shelter from the rain that poured through the roof. While I was admiring the vegetation which had sprung up on this roof, Alexander Petrovitch, who lived in the next yard, came up, longer and thinner than ever, and with rather unsteady eyes. But he was so genuinely glad to see me, that it suddenly felt good to be near such a warm-hearted man,

in this world of cold vice and crime, of superstition and suspicion. But alas, Alexander Petrovitch, in spite of his goodwill, had taken to drink, to the sorrow of a wife with tearful eyes when, overcome by vodka, he dropped his shaven round head on to the American-cloth-covered table. '*Masha*,' she said, 'I could hate you.' But he replied, 'Birdie, little birdie.' She shook her head: 'What will it all lead to?' He threw himself on the bed and said, 'To hell.' So here was this once happy and devoted couple drifting helplessly away from their better impulses in this world of crime and suspicion.

'The International Transport Co.,' whose quarters were opposite, had closed down. It had once been a flourishing concern, bringing a good deal of English money into Mongolia, but steady losses, no doubt influenced by Russia, had been its ruin. Its large, solid compound, an oasis in this Russo-Asiatic decay, was now taken over by the Mongolian municipality, and only two young Englishmen were left to attend to the winding up. These were quartered in a Russian house close by, where the few foreigners, still left of the European group, used to meet. Everyone was suspicious and much spied upon; even the fact of entering this house was enough to bring one under the vigilant eye of the Ochrana. There was a young Englishman amongst them, who, having lost his way on the borders of Mongolia, unwittingly entered its domain without a passport. He was brought to Urga under escort, his Chinese retinue were flung into prison, and he escaped the same fate by a hair's breadth. All his papers were taken from him, and he was forbidden to leave the town under pain of death. So here the poor fellow had been for eight months, never knowing when his fate might take a turn for the worse, and unable to find a soul to help him. Yet whenever he appeared, his unfailing sense of humour cheered up the rest of the hunted company, till at last the united efforts of several of his

friends were able to procure his liberation; but his Chinese staff were held back by the torturing claws of the Ochrana, and no one knows what became of them.

By the time I had been in Urga two days, I, too, felt oppressed by the anxiety and fear which overshadowed the others. We were always in a state of suspense: a thoughtless word, twisted into unrecognizable significance, might bring the worst consequences; an enemy was easily made, and the Ochrana was all-powerful. A written note was one day handed to Alexander Petrovitch requesting him to go to the Ochrana. He turned pale as he read it, and then drank himself into a state of oblivion. Once, having overpaid a Chinese coachman by double his fare, I refused to add a further sum he asked for; and hereupon he got furious and shouted he would denounce me at the Ochrana. The obvious reply would have been my fist, but realizing the risk, I turned and went away. Half an hour later I saw him at the same place, foaming at the mouth and gesticulating wildly, with a ring of Mongolian onlookers around him. God knows what stories he told in the frenzy he had worked himself into. Such trivial occurrences often enough ended in tragedy, for the demons of Mongolia had become a living reality to the helpless Asiatic mentality, which submitted passively to this reign of terror.

A rumour was abroad that Japanese troops were concentrating on the Manchurian frontier. Some cars which had crossed the frontier in the east did not come back; war had begun again in China, while in Urga contributions were being collected for the English coal strikers!

A Russian of this benevolent Committee grinned sarcastically as he informed us that there was revolution in England; that the King had fallen; that Russia had succeeded in poisoning this hated enemy with the germs of dissolution, and its Constitution was falling to pieces. All foreign newspapers were confiscated, and letters from

abroad were so carefully censored that they lay about in heaps everywhere for one to chose from. In all sorts of drawers, anywhere, with luck one might find a letter addressed to oneself.

A Russian teacher, a woman, had been lured from Kiachta to Urga by official promises, but on the second day of her arrival she vanished. Behind Mongolia lay the vague immensity of China, when the vanishing of anyone had to be explained; so officially she had gone to China, though in reality her journey ended in the Ochrana. There were a good many young Russian women here who had accompanied the officials sent to Mongolia, glad of any excuse to get out of Russia. At the first opportunity the connection which brought them was severed, and they began to look about for a chance of getting into China. They were young, vigorous, and lively creatures, in silk stockings, high-heeled shoes, and cheap but showy dresses. Even now in the rainy season they could be seen tripping along close to the houses, picking their way through the mud and avoiding puddles like rope-walkers. Beyond the steppes of Mongolia lay China and Peking, and beyond that they imagined they could see the mirage of Paris, the goal of their desire, in this fairy-tale world out of the *Arabian Nights*. At the very mention of Tientsin or Shanghai their eyes would light up and they became confidential. A natural instinct for life, a desire for light and glamour, drew them out of the hell of their own country. Young and strong as the horses of the Siberian peasants, with a very rudimentary human soul struggling within them, they were drawn to the light like moths, and like moths, singed their wings all too quickly.

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The Committee of the Third International was holding

a conference at the Narodni Domo, to which the Mongolian public flocked. Plays with revolutionary propaganda were staged by an amateur troupe. In these plays Kaiser Wilhelm, Franz-Joseph of Austria, and the Tsar, were buried in turn under the ruins of crumbling factories; affluent factory-directors in sudden self-accusation caught up a stage pistol and blew out their brains at the harrowing sight of the hairy, sweating breast of a worker, or the curly rather apostolic head of a wage-paymaster. Finally the curtain was lowered, usually in obstinate unmanageable jerks, to a loud chorus of the 'International.' At times there would be film propaganda against infectious disease – usually beginning with a love scene between a factory-owner and a girl of the people, and then showing the necessary and unnecessary consequences.

On this occasion there were arm-chairs and benches on the stage, and tables covered with green cloth. There were attempts at decoration, and the background was the scene left from the last performance, showing the hectic atmosphere, in yellow and red, of work, with blue silhouettes of factory chimneys of every conceivable size and shape, the windows of the building being indicated by square-cut holes covered with red paper. A former war prisoner, an Austrian, who had drifted into Mongolia, was responsible for the decoration and painting; a nice fellow, and quite harmless, with a guileless Viennese mentality which made me think of a sparrow in a wolf's cage.

In the centre of the hall a huge Mongolian vessel stood shoulder high, filled with a milky brew. Each one who entered went straight to this, undisturbed by the speechifying that was in full swing, pulled up the tubelike sleeve of his left arm, took a wooden bowl out of his breast, and dipped it in this brew. Then he looked round until he recognized a friend, and with dripping bowl he then proceeded to push his way through the crowd to hand it

to his friend with the word '*Daravish*' (companion). An atmosphere of close fraternal goodwill seemed to prevail. The speeches were in Russian, which Mongolians tried to use with more or less success, and though few understood it there was always great applause of '*Za.*' Russian officials with leather cases under their arms came in, sat about, or stood at the doors for a while, and departed again. Finally all rose to sing the 'International,' and the Mongolian hymn, after which a scramble began, the crowd being like a lot of children leaving school. A chain of merry friends, half intoxicated, came arm-in-arm, and tried to get out of the narrow doors all together, with much laughter. Officials hurried to their horses, mounted, and rode off with their leather cases tucked under their arms; others in high tight-laced Mongolian coats of blue and raspberry-pink went on foot in Russian boots that were too narrow, and Russian military caps askew, or pushed well back – these represented modern Mongolia.

Opposite to the Narodni Domo, beyond the open space crossed by a muddy stream, the golden roofs of the Sharsum monastery shone and quivered in the dusty midday glare. To the south its great gates that faced the Bogdo-Ool were flung wide open, and a huge scaffolding was being erected. Here the tottering powers of the Church were at work building an open altar for the three gigantic Tankus, the white, the green and the blue Dolnö, the national goddesses of Tibet, Mongolia, and China – though no longer honoured by the new regime. The monastery was preparing for the Feast of Demons, which was to be celebrated in the language of the unfortunate country the Russians were now trying to draw into the noose of their cunning tyranny. About the necks of the Mongolian youth its meshes were easily thrown.

Not long ago an offset press was erected in this town. It was of modern construction and recent date, and was

capable of turning out 2000 copies per hour, provided it was constantly worked and controlled. It now stood in this distant capital of a country, all desert and pasture-land, with a population of two and a half millions spread over its wide area, in groups connected – or separated – only by slow-pacing caravans led by Mongols who stammer a few words of Russian, and Russians who murder the Mongolian tongue. Round the huge plant of this press people would collect and admire the gleaming machinery in its passive repose. Near by a two-storeyed house was being built by indigenous architects, who had forgotten the stairway to the upper storeys! Further away the Chinese were erecting a huge jurt of wood which was to be the new Narodni Domo, large enough, they say, to hold all Mongolia.

The customs officers had to bleed their victims heavily; for the army, the Russians, the offset press, the house without a staircase – all these devour money. The next move was an attempt to slit the money-bags of the Church. The ten thousand copper Buddhas in Galdan were taxed at the rate of seven per cent. per holy countenance. Most of the 'living Buddhas' were in jail; as heads of the Church they were the first to fall into disfavour. The Ochrana had many spies eavesdropping at the felt walls of the lamas' jurts, and readily accepted their denunciations. From the jail red-coats in couples, escorted by a Mongolian soldier with rifle at full cock, could be seen wandering to the little grey stream to empty their slops. Their worn shoes and ragged coats bore witness that they had come from distant corners: these men with hollow cheeks and salient cheek-bones, torn from their quiet meditations, and shortly to disappear. The spectre of Sucha Bator still hovers over the temples and monasteries crying for vengeance.

. . . . .

A squadron of cossacks came riding across the large open space before the Sharsum monastery. Above the clatter of horses' feet and the rising cloud of dust, the long wailing commands ring out. 'De – – – file!' The front row pulls up, those further back spread and gallop forward forming a front of lances, rising out of the dust. I hastily hide my camera. 'Att – – – ack!' A few Mongols scamper out of the way. At the further end of the ground, 'Halt. Formation – – – advance!' Voices begin to sing a Russian song, others join in, and soon the full chorus sings a melancholy refrain with constant repetition. Such displays are produced daily on the various open spaces of Urga, with much clatter of sword, and various parade-ground tricks, to impress the Mongols.

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A few days later I attended the second 'Zam-feast' of the Lama Church. From earliest dawn small groups of peasants trotted into the town on their ponies with gay streamers floating in the breeze. Soon after midday a crowd of men and women and children in holiday attire came to the open ground before the Sharsum monastery, from where the wind brought gusts of trumpet-like blasts and drum-beating. About a thousand onlookers clustered together, some on foot, others mounted; a jumble of colours that glinted like a turning kaleidoscope in the changing sunlight. A triangular cordon of soldiers marked off the clear space with lines of dirty ochre-yellow. They leant against the advancing crowd with hands joined to push them back.

It was a wonderful spectacle! A fantasy of colour, an orgy of gleaming silks and beads – like a dream butterfly with widespread wings basking in the sunshine. Here was pure Asia in an undisturbed revelry of colour. The Russians in the black-belted shirts, dark breeches, and heavy boots,

hovered about like evil nightmares, or like naughty children expelled from the feast, and watching from a distance the joys of the blessed in Paradise.

All this wealth of colour overwhelmed me; so I packed up my painting material and moved about idly, watching the show. Before me stood a grotesque masked apparition, a demon's face with a crown of human skulls, and a glossy horsehair mane, its open jaws full of fiendish teeth. It stared at me with the eyes of a dead fish, but between its dragon teeth the moist gleam of two human eyes seemed like the dying glance of a half-swallowed victim.

There were many young Russian women in the crowd, always on the look-out for some chance of getting into China. One of these, a fair girl in white, stood close behind me. As I turned I saw in her staring eyes this dragon mask mirrored in minutest detail for a moment; then the crowd surged under the pressure of the military cordon, and a wave pushed me back and elsewhere; but presently the steady pressure sent me forward again towards the soldiers, who were now squatting on the ground. Masks were flying round in dance, ropes of beads were whirling in swift circles amid floating veils of pink and blue. On their wide-brimmed hats a flamboyant ornament flashed its golden flames, broadening and narrowing as it was turned in the dance. In the centre of this flashing headpiece was a skull and cross-bones with the fingers of a skeleton hand spread out like a fan. As they danced their swinging hands held the *dorje*, the sceptre of lamaism, made of four rings welded together and decorated with fluttering ribbons.

Everywhere one heard the '*Za*' of Mongol greeting and pleasure, which is untranslatable, and is accompanied by a closed fist with thumb stuck up, very like the gesture the old Romans used as a sign of clemency for some blood-stained gladiator whose head had touched the sand of the arena.

I stood entranced by the magic of this demon dance, this resplendent pomp and wealth of old Asiatic culture, which by contact with the West so quickly turns into a tawdry ludicrous farce. That fair-haired Russian girl stood beside me again, staring at the feast. A moment later she asked me for a light, twirling a cigarette between her fingers. Then her hand touched mine, and she asked what I thought of all this? It was not to her taste, she said; this barbaric show repelled her, she longed for Paris, and with this she seized my hand and pulled me out of the crowd. She only spoke Russian, and was much more interested in the possibility I represented than in the feast. I tried to stammer some words in very halting Russian, for this little adventure offered me a glimpse into a Russian woman's mentality. We sauntered through a maze of narrow lanes between various palisaded enclosures. As we turned a bend the damsel took my arm but very soon discreetly dropped it. Glancing up, I discovered the reason for this in a tall Russian standing on the flat roof overhead, watching the feast from there. Probably he was her temporary consort. As we came to the entrance she whispered, 'Wait five minutes,' and went in. I did wait in the narrow lane, till presently the tall Russian appeared in the doorway prepared to take a walk, whereupon I withdrew, knowing well that this fair lady could find her way to my quarters if she desired, and wishing to avoid an episode that might lead to trouble in the shape of a denunciation.

Two days later she was taking an early morning walk up and down before my house. As soon as I appeared she came in and asked after my health. She came so close that I could feel the warmth of her body, and then she begged me to take her to China, to Tientsin or Shanghai. Her hands trembled as she took mine and said, '*Daravish.*' Never before had I realized so fully the meaning of this word. It sounded like the cry of one in prison, or like

the cry of one who drowns – a cry for help. With this '*Daravish*' she was ready to offer all she had, on the chance of getting into China, one step nearer to the Parisian Mecca of her dreams, which she would never reach, for dazzled by China, if ever she got so far, she would sink rapidly – a life broken on the wheel of the law. '*Daravish*' . . . across the steppes of Mongolia the mirage of Paris rises . . . for is it not written that all roads lead to Rome?

THE LAST OF URGA

A Mongol could be seen one morning climbing up a steep incline of the hill on which the monastery of Galdan is perched. With one hand he rotated his prayer-wheel diligently, while the fingers of the other were busy with the beads of his rosary. His feet, in their canoe-shaped boots, dragged heavily through the narrow alley and passages of this town of lamas, which clustered like a lot of open boxes round the temple, divided by high palisades. The sandy open spaces, and the high, slanting walls of the Temple of the Ten Thousand Buddhas lay in the full glare of the sun, under the cool blue vastness of the atmosphere.

Just before the Mongol reached the last palisade surrounding the courtyard of the temple, he staggered and fell forward in ugly convulsions, still clutching his prayer-wheel. A few priests in amber-coloured silken robes and bright red shoulder-scarves came out and surrounded him with chattering curiosity, while the unfortunate man writhed and groaned on the ground, burying his face in the curve of his quaking arms, and drawing his knees up in convulsive spasms. Presently he jerked himself into a sitting posture, threw his limp head suddenly up, turned his eyes inwards, and fell back into the dust with widespread arms. Thus he died, and lay with his blue shaven skull gleaming in the cool Mongolian sunlight.

Meanwhile scavenger dogs made their appearance and approached unperceived in a wide circle around this lamentable spectacle, sniffing the ground and growling in bloodthirsty and sullen eagerness. The biggest and boldest

ones led the way, followed by a pack of scurvy, mangy, sore-eyed creatures, some scarcely able to stagger along on lame and rickety limbs. They approached in increasing numbers and ever-narrowing circles, now and then showing sharp teeth at each other in canine ferocity; arching their backs with raised bristles, each grudging the other the chance of attacking this delectable corpse lying prone, and limp, and warm on the ground. One of the chattering lamas suddenly looked round, and realizing the situation, stooped to pick up stones, which he hurled into the thick of the approaching brutes. But it was too late, for the next moment the dogs flew to attack their meal, and the lamas were glad to make their escape, kicking their way through these ghoulish fiends as best they could, with their clumsy canoe-shaped boots, and swinging their arms in vigorous protest. From all sides dogs and more dogs streamed on to this open place before the Temple of Galdan, and hurled themselves into the wild scrimmage over the dark heap underfoot. Pointed heads were tossed up with sharp teeth gleaming white in snarling fury, besmirched all down the neck with dark blood. Growling and yapping creatures drew and tore at long bloodstained strings of entrails, and under the whirl of their many trampling feet the pale soles of the dead Mongol's boots shifted about as the corpse was dragged to and fro upon the ground. The dead was being torn to pieces while the flesh yet steamed, here in the centre of Galdan surrounded by the dwellings of lamas. These gathered in groups before their red door-posts, watching this horror from a safe distance, while they chattered and fingered their rosaries. Now and then one of them would throw a stone into this seething mass of scraggy, ravenous brutes, and then turn to his companion, laughing at the dogs' unheeding lust for food.

The news of this death had spread to the lower town, where people were soon afoot, gathering at the further

edge of the open place. An enterprising Englishwoman, who had honoured Urga with a few days' visit, appeared in all haste with her camera, and ran from one spot to another, to find the best vantage ground from which to view this horror. Just then the mangled corpse became visible to her for a moment, its limp arms seeming to flap helplessly on the dust with open palms, as the dogs tore at the muscles under its shoulder-blades – and the Englishwoman fell promptly in a dead faint into the arms of a Russian, though she was usually as tough as any wearer of breeches.

By the afternoon the fury of the dogs had abated, and there were only one or two left gnawing at the remains of the corpse. Crows now began to gather, anxious for their share.

Then a few relatives of the dead man came – evidently known to the lamas, and brought simple gifts for the abbot of the monastery, carrying in a cloth a few objects that had been especially dear to the late departed. They were hospitably received, and entertained by the abbot, while a regular bargaining took place. The lamas undertook for the payment of three ponies to hold a service in the temple in which the dead man had been accustomed to perform his devotions. Also a special guru was to be told off to read the Bardo Thodol on the spot where the death had taken place, and two alternating lama choirs were for a whole day and night to intone a service, to help the spirit of the dead man gain the Western Paradise of Amithaba without passing through the undesirable intermediate stages. For his services the guru acquired, besides the pony and several sheep, all the wearing apparel of the dead man. The lama choirs received two ponies. Total: six ponies approximately worth five hundred dollars Mex., and several sheep worth six or eight dollars a head. The fact that the dead man's corpse had been torn to pieces by

the dogs was a source of great satisfaction to the Mongols, being a good omen.

After this a lama came up, and, stooping low over the head, he commanded the soul to forsake its body, and to sever all its ties with living relatives and friends, or with any earthly possessions. Then he examined the crown of the skull along the dovetailed joining seam, to make sure that the soul had really departed. After this the abbot escorted the group from his jurt through the courtyard as far as the exit, where each guest lifted the hem of his dirty robe and pressed it to his forehead and face; and then they all departed, well satisfied with the bargain they had made with the gods. Two or three lamas followed a little later to fetch the three ponies, which they led back and tied to the entrance posts of the temple where the service was to take place, and here they stood tethered together, with idly drooping heads.

By sundown the whole of Galdan was throbbing and pulsing, as though convulsed by the heartbeats of a dying world. Over the open spaces of Urga the wind blew shreds of torn sounds – one could distinguish the clashing of cymbals, the deep or shrill voices of brass instruments, the persistent rhythm of drumbeats. High above the medley of wooden houses and jurts, the golden roof of the Temple of Galdan caught the last rays of the setting sun, and the Temple of the Ten Thousand Buddhas reared its square white walls, narrowing at the top, high into the slanting light over this town of wood and felt. It carried its square windows far above ground, like a fortress towering above the invisible ramparts of all the many religions of Asia.

Strange dark deeds are said to take place in this monastery of Galdan amongst its thousands of priests all vowed to celibacy. This was well known to every Mongol, without in the least perturbing him. The moral decadence and the morass of vice in which these priests live, in no way affected

their dignity, or their officiating status as agents and links between heaven and earth. Their doings or failings as men were their own private concern, for which without doubt they would have to render personal account to their gods. The life of this world was selfishly bound by the terrible belief in Sangsara, of the everlasting pilgrimage between death and rebirth, from which only Nirvana can bring complete relief. After the dissolution of the body, the soul has to face terrifying demons in those dreadful middle regions. Woe to him who lets the fires of this hell dazzle and lead him astray, or who steps unprepared into the jaws of such horrors. Each of the forty-nine stages of this journey is ready to absorb him, and to compel his rebirth in its unhappy limitations. With all the strength of thy soul (plus thine earthly possessions, of course) implore thou the help of the divine Mother for a successful transit through these regions; the keys of its by-ways and mazes being deposited in the temples of the lamas. And on this enthusiasm for the divine reward of Nirvana, inspired by the fear of the unknown, on this longing for the holy ending that yields more blessedness than the spirit of man can imagine, rests the sinister power of an absolute hierarchy, though their sway today seems to be losing some of its grip.

The Sharsum monastery, lying on the plain below, also showed signs of awakening. In its chief temple the recent mummy of the last living Buddha or Hutuktu had been deposited, arrayed in gorgeous silken robes, his painted eyes smiling vaguely out of a gilded face into the steady flames of many lamps of burning butter placed before his shrine. Rows of red-robed lamas sit round the altars in graduated grouping, down to the lowest, those who beat the punctuation to the deep droning recitations of prayers. This they do with crooked canes on circular drums, mounted as it were on a stalk, and held in one hand. Cymbals flash and clash together like fragments of splintering glass.

Conches that might be of moulded porcelain wail and miaul into the din. The long tubes of trumpets are stretched across the temple floor like copper telescopes, resting on small wooden benches, and give vent to short-toned grunts and groans. Into this maddening and jarring din the punctuation beats fall in dull thuds. Lamas sway their bodies backwards and forwards while they wind and weave their dirty hands into graceful *mudra* poses, or quiver and stretch them in conceptions of mystery, as accompaniment to the chanting of their prayers. While the chant swells, rising and sinking in dark waves, the clash of cymbals seems like a flash of lightning, and the brass and drums give the short roll of thunder, as the din works up to a climax, and is finally overwhelmed and controlled by a skull drum rattling with the regular beat of a throbbing heart.

Above all this clamour the forest-clad ridge of the sacred hill of Bogdo-Ool gathers blackness from the dark shrouds of night.

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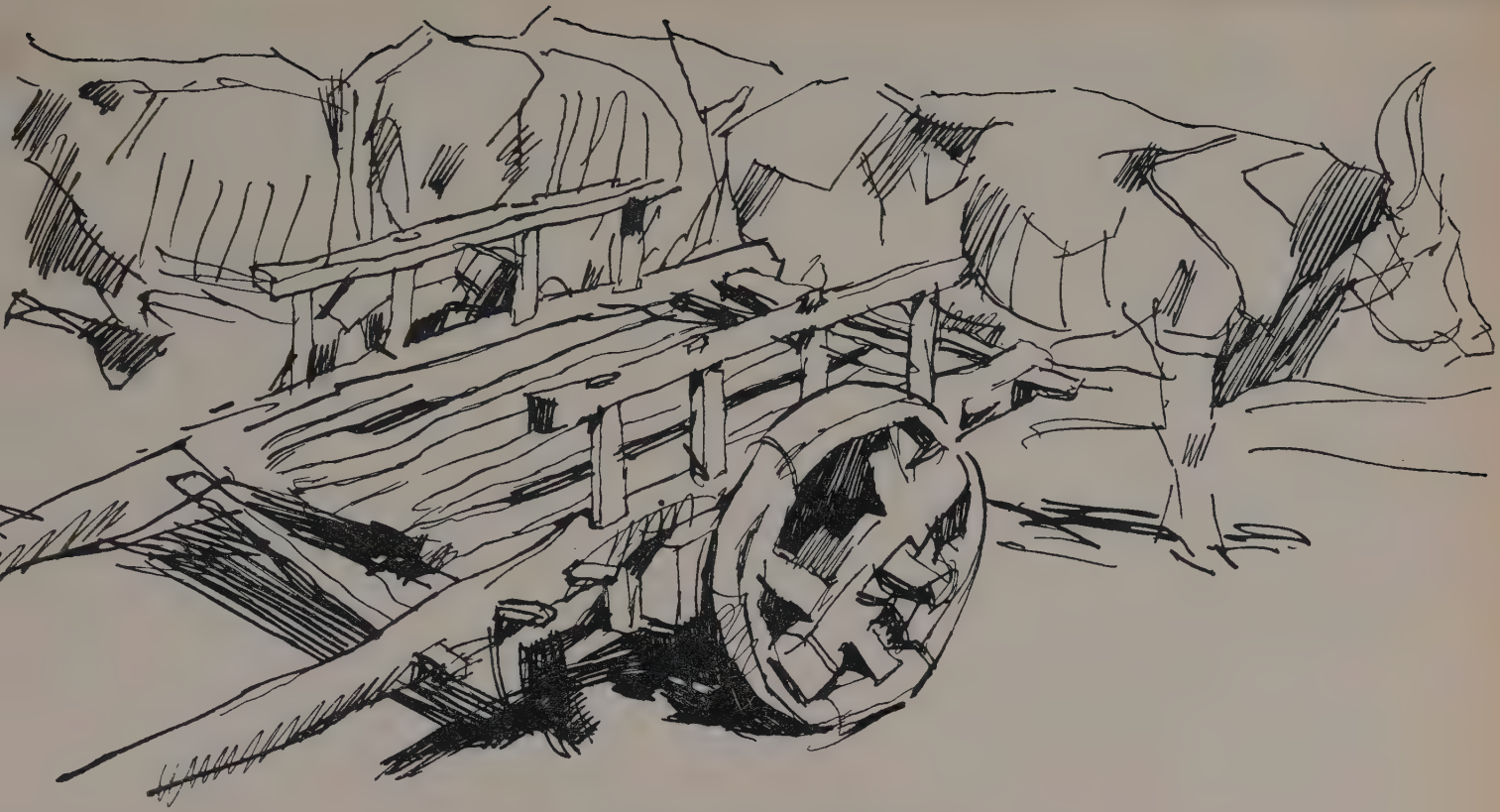
Over the open places of Urga three hundred bullock-carts creep in endless line, like a serpent writhing in weary contortions. Their clumsy wooden wheels creak, and groan, and squeal in stiff, jerky movements as the carts follow the dry traces of deep-cut wheel-tracks, or bump over large stones. This noisy reptile winds and stretches, moving ever forward. Day in, day out, it crawls over these open places towards the east, a continuous string of carts in single file, dragging their way through the dusty outskirts of Urga, to the banks of the Tola. It creeps over the wooden bridge, and slides downwards between some hills beside the line of telegraph poles, and along the pale tracks of former caravans through the Gobi southwards to Kalgan.

This string of carts has been winding for the last few weeks in unceasing procession through the town. At night a swaying paper lantern is hoisted on to the leading cart, and the others appear and vanish as they pass the solitary light on the open place, and move on into darkness. During the day they pass under a great banner of grey dust, which hovers over their path amid the continual lament of infernal voices rising from tortured axles as they jolt by. They are all laden with the same cases, narrow and long; two on each cart, not corded, for their own weight keeps them in position. All have the same branding: 'Manufactured in Birmingham.' These carts are transporting munitions for the Chinese dragon, which is busy tearing its own flesh. Munitions are being spewed out towards China by Russia: gases, shrapnel, and cartridges are hauled over the Gobi on these shrill-voiced wooden wheels of prehistoric construction. They go to Kalgan, to the camp of Feng Yu-hsiang, who has sold himself to Russia, and has hoisted the Red flag.

This officer was once on the staff of Chang So-lin, General in Command of the fighting forces in Peking. But Feng, the ungrateful, betrayed his master and contrived, for the sake of his own interests, to overlook the dishonesty of his conduct, though he called himself a Christian, and knew his Bible by heart. Russia agreed to help him to secure his independence, thus tendering him a bait in which the hidden hook was so well concealed that he failed to see it. So Feng collected an army of riffraff and beggars, and once a week, from the pulpit of the mission church at Kalgan, he explained to them that all men were brothers – a statement which his congregation heard with open-mouthed incredulity. For eighteen months Feng lay with his all-devouring army between Peking and Kalgan. He stamped his own money, his bank-notes being of mere paper value. If you tried to buy any commodity



MONGOLIAN BULLOCK-CART

with these, that particular ware was not in stock, or the merchant grew feverishly eloquent in disparagement thereof. For Feng Yu-hsiang was trying to create a world of his own, to build up a fantastic castle of sand. Even the beggars in the streets would take his money only to throw it into the mud. One after the other the shops put up their shutters and closed, the owners having been put to death by Feng's orders, for refusing to take his money. At the same time he prided himself on being the protector of peaceful commerce, and sought the publicity of the Press for his propaganda of peace, while from the north gases, shrapnel, and cartridges were pouring in, and Russian instructors were arriving to erect defences round his unstable and fictitious kingdom. Heavy clouds were gathering in the north-east, and a steadily rising flood threatened to wash away this castle of sand.

The natural stronghold of the Nankau Pass between Kalgan and Peking had been strengthened and fortified. A mountain ridge which rose to the north and north-east of the plateau of Mongolian pasture-land and sank in terraces towards Peking was chosen, from where to withstand the brunt of the enemy tide and to break the force of its impact, as once before the force of the Tartar storm-flood had been broken by the earth-filled flanks of the Great Wall of China. This great weather-beaten Wall, which still winds over hills and valleys, like a huge double-ridged reptile, has its dorsal ridge formed by crenellated battlements. It winds along the top of steep inclines, its watch-towers glowing in the sunlight, as they look down on the long steel lines of the Peking-Kalgan railway, that now runs through the valley. On the heights above this old wall there are freshly made trenches of modern warfare, looking like dried water-courses. Should Chang So-lin's troops, which were advancing in forced marches from the east against Dolo-nor, the capital of inner Mongolia,

knock in Feng Yu-hsiang's first buffer line, dug in to the east of Kalgan, and sweep over Kalgan itself, they would then still find the gates to Peking effectively bolted, for nature had here formed a very strong point of defence, against which the weakened storming power of troops that had spent long months in dusty marches from distant Manchuria would fare badly. After eighteen months of apparent peace King Feng was forced to confront his former master, now backed by the financial support of Japan and England.

Chang So-lin, the former Johol bandit,[1] with his cruel, sickle-shaped Tartar moustache and cunning eyes, was an enemy who would show no mercy. His soldiers were recruited from the same stock, and the troops used in this case would be picked men of the most dangerous type. A mob of Chinese rabble, without a spark of conviction for the cause for which they fought, armed to the teeth with the most modern implements of murder, they were impatiently waiting their chance to loot and murder without restraint. Their pay consisted in the noble right to hang upon their persons everything they could lay hold on in the shape of weapons and munitions, and to use these as they saw fit. They were a well-organized band of robbers and bandits, laying waste the erstwhile peaceful countryside of China.

Compared with this breed of wolves, Feng Yu-hsiang's troops were mere lambs. They had a natural leaning towards peace, and Feng was endeavouring to turn them into good burghers, taking children of ten into his army, with a view to keeping them under his supervision and watching over their education. A thunderbolt now fell into the peaceful heaven of this general, who, in contradiction to his supposed calling and to many of his deeds, believed himself to be fulfilling the mission of a Christian.

[1] Johol, a province of China where all are bandits.

Seen from the heights of Kalgan, his camp lay spread out like the contents of a toy box, tidy and compact, encompassed by the blare of bugles. Just a few tents, a few Chinese courtyards surrounded by square walls, a few long stretches of barracks. Framed in the luscious green of maize fields, his camp had the appearance of a peaceful mission settlement; his soldiers busy learning to read and write, and carrying pocket editions of the Bible in their breast-pockets. And now the army of Chang So-lin was approaching from the north-east, like an evil nightmare. The mere mention of the word *Feng-tien* (Mukden) was enough to close the lips of every Chinese.

Meanwhile this endless string of munition waggons defiled through the sun-baked Gobi. Ford cars also, terribly dented and bent about, and woefully repaired with wire – mere gouty iron skeletons with a dust-and oil-encrusted heart that still managed to throb – tore to and fro between Kalgan and Urga in endless lines, like a herd of stampeding elephants. The chauffeurs were a colony apart, and with childish excitement they usually turned these journeys into a race. With only about a foot of interval between them they rushed along at the rate of forty miles an hour, over high-ridged furrows which were at times two feet deep. Over stones and cross-drains they bumped and swayed in headlong speed, those within clinging on with clenched teeth, in the intervals of being tossed high and caught again. These drivers did not seem to have any nerves whatever, but rather to be possessed by a spirit of foolhardy recklessness. Although some of the maltreated vehicles had done their thirty thousand miles at least, the meter still recorded a three-ciphered mileage. Anything in these cars that was not an indispensable part of the motor had been demolished. The honeycomb of the radiators was smashed in all directions, and water at boiling point oozed out at many points. The glasses of the

reflectors were broken and the hoods of the bonnets rattled loose on their base like a lot of crumpled tin, showing rusty and mildewy patches as big as plates. These cars reminded me often of the unfortunate domestic animals of Asia, maltreated, neglected, and overworked, staggering along under a merciless yoke – for the same careless vandalism was apparent. But I was also moved to admiration as I watched these skeletons race across the open places of Urga, the drivers in dark goggles leaning over their steering-wheels. Every week the same faces showed up and then vanished again. They covered the distance to Kalgan and back in six days, and I, stranded at Urga, followed their retreating forms with longing eyes, for the ground began to burn under my feet in my growing desire to see the last of this God-forsaken country.

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The Hutuktu died in 1925. His property was now being sold under the supervision of the State in sheds on the market-place of Urga. These sheds resembled the very treasure-caves of Ali Baba and the forty thieves. They contained riches enough to fill all the museums of Europe with the rarest and most precious specimens of Asiatic work, mixed up with European bazaar trash, in which the childish-hearted Mongols delighted. There were thousands of watches of every kind and description, the late owner's special craze. He loved to hear their hearts beat day and night, and to listen to their thin, shrill striking. There were cheap ornaments, triumphs of European tastelessness and ugliness, and oleographs of fantastic castles, picnic-parties and hunting-scenes, and other such banalities. This 'Living Buddha' was a centre towards which, from all directions, gifts flowed in, brought by devout pilgrims who were allowed to see the face of their

saint for a moment. Thousands, in need of comfort and blessing, had come from afar to kiss the mud from the soles of his boots with their blistered lips, after long marches lasting for months in dazzling, parching sunlight, in burning dust and icy nights. Arrived at last before the golden-roofed palace, they continually prostrated themselves on their faces in the sacred dust, and gathered it into little bags which they tied round their necks. For a momentary glance from the dim, milky eyes of the 'Living Buddha' no sacrifice was too great, no trouble too much, for this was the crown of their life! – And now these accumulated tributes lay in coloured heaps for sale.

Rumour said the Hutuktu had been dead a long while, but that the lamas had kept this secret, so that the shower of presents might continue. His wasted body was propped up in a high-backed chair, a lama lifting his limp arms like those of a doll in the sign of blessing over the people who lay prostrate on the ground before his throne. In the course of years the accruing treasures grew into mounds of silver, and gold, and silk. At his death all this should have passed into the possession of the Church, but in a new decree it was confiscated by the State, valued by Russian and Mongolian officials, and sold by public auction. Indigenous handicraft found a poor market, and was sold for the mere value of the silver or gold it contained, without any consideration for the quality of the workmanship, whereas European trash was eagerly bought at absurd prices. Two Chinese vases of the best Ming period went at the ridiculous price of fifty dollars Mex. into the hands of a Chinaman who retired into China with his bargain and disposed of it there a week later for 8000 taels.

A few astute Chinamen, good merchants by instinct, bought what they could and carried it off into their own country. But soon a report of the high prices these things obtained in China came back to Urga, and led to a prompt

interruption of the sale, and a revaluation. The worth of everything was doubled, but was still far below its real value. Mongols went about the town wearing quaintly shaped felt hats in every imaginable colour, with little paper roses woven into the cords. Piles of these hats of Czecho origin had been found amongst the late Hutuktu's possessions, and the Mongols, loving bright colours, grabbed them with both hands, lifting their eyebrows to the very tops of their foreheads with pleasure. I rummaged about these sheds for several days, seeing much and acquiring a few things of fine Asiatic workmanship, such as the present generation seems no longer capable of producing. The taste of the people had now turned towards Russian provincialism. They discarded the pointed Mongolian shoes, so wonderfully shaped and richly ornamented, and preferred to go about in high Russian boots. The girls bobbed their oily hair and wore Russian military caps, girthing-in their waists with a narrow leather strap. The horsehair wigs Mongolian women used to wear, with their hair shaped into flat curved horns, their golden or silver skull-caps all encrusted with pearls or gems, and flat horn pins, lay discarded about the sheds, and found no sale. As the nation changed its mind, it changed its taste in clothes. At the proclamation of the republic, notices were put up, decreeing that no Mongolian woman was allowed to wear more than five dollars' worth of jewellery on her person – the rest was torn off if she did.

Mongols from the country avoided Urga as though it were smitten by the plague. Things had calmed down for the time being, but the invidious undermining influence of Russia steadily increased, and China was already seething towards boiling-point. Chang So-lin's gangs began to appear on the skyline of the vast steppes of inner Mongolia, and from the east wild rumours came of Japanese forces gathering on the Manchurian frontier.

Low-hanging full-bellied clouds of the south-west monsoon began to unburden in downpours on the pasture-land, and the wheels of the munition-bearing Ford cars splashed through muddy lakes of shallow water. I betook myself daily to the dirty one-storeyed building of the Ochrana at the top of the market-place, and stood about its passages while doors opened and shut. Russians with narrow foreheads, their faces heavily marked by smallpox, and black-cropped hair, stiff with the electric currents of communistic ideas, hurried from room to room, throwing the remains of their 'papierosse' before the doors. In the windows, Mongolian soldiers lounged, unbelievably dirty and unkempt, holding between their knees the unpolished wooden stocks of Russian rifles, with the three-edged bayonets fixed on. They had a stolid and impudent expression. Everything was in a desperate muddle of disorder. Should anyone's passport get mislaid in this labyrinth of dirt and vermin, it was never seen again. Passports of unknown individuals were put before one, and could be annexed at one's own risk of consequences, for one was henceforth answerable for the delinquencies of the person photographed and named thereon, without any right of protest or hope of clearing up the mistake. Most of the Mongols here were unable to read or write, and their very faulty knowledge of foreign names was augmented by substituting indigenous spelling for the foreign syllables, until the names became quite unrecognizable. Each official spelt the surname differently, and each examined the passport according to his own methods. It all seemed a hopeless muddle. Every morning before starting on my way to the Ochrana, which soon became a torture-chamber to me, I screwed up my courage and my spirits; but always came back in the same hopeless dejection, glad only to have got away from that dreadful place for the time being. It grew more obvious daily that my departure was being delayed in every possible way, by

advancing the most trivial excuses; my movements were being watched more closely than I realized, in the hope of being able to accuse me of some fault. Since my return to Urga I had not begun to work again, trying only to escape, the more I recognized the intangible hindrances that were always raised to block my departure. I was anxious to get well away before the conditions in China rose to boiling-point, and the gates of Mongolia were bolted. My one object was to get my boat with its dearly won harvest of two and a half years' work and travel amidst indescribable difficulties, privations, and dangers, safe into port. I hovered round the Ochrana, and gathered all the friendly influences I could muster in Urga to help my departure. A Buriat proved to be my most successful prop. He was a former cavalry officer in Russia, an excellent revolver-shot with a cunning eye. The Chief Commissioner was his countryman – for all the higher posts were occupied by Buriats, who spoke the Russian and Mongolian languages equally well. When I interviewed this crafty Buriat, he made a point of impressing on me how much trouble he had taken on my behalf. The Ochrana had given him more than one hint that he was over-keen in the interests of foreigners; so he wisely denied the power of his influence at the Ochrana, not wishing to give himself away. In his patent-leather shoes he stood about at all corners and heard and knew most things. This man was the embodied spirit of modern Mongolia. He was a Mongolian-Russian half-caste, sufficiently related to both sides to keep his head well above these turbid waters.

When my prospects began to take a turn for the better, the possibility of any private car from Urga to Kalgan was almost nil. Some chauffeurs who were taking freight to Manchuria had not returned, and those left in Urga no longer cared to risk the journey into China. This state of things very possibly influenced the Ochrana in giving me

permission to leave, knowing well that there was little chance of my doing so, or of getting far. No mortal could tell the real state of affairs in China at that time, nor where the troops of Chang So-lin were located, or those of Feng Yu-hsiang. A Russian publication called the *Pravda* appearing spasmodically in Urga bestrode the hobby-horse of a world-revolution with constantly new and successful versions. The spirit of well-goaded colportage clothed in the garb of official news 'received by wireless' emanated from its pages. But the receivers seemed only to cull news from the wildest regions of pure fantasy: The greatest victory of the Russian World-Revolution had been gained, England, that conservative stronghold of capitalism, lay in the dust, its Throne shattered by the hands of the proletariat, and Urga was asked to collect funds for the good cause. The ground in India and China was said to tremble under the armies gathered round the Red flag, marching from victory to victory. In China, all being in excellent order, the troops of that bandit-general, Chang So-lin, in the pay of capitalistic Powers, were said to be beaten in the first encounter, and the belly of Feng Yu-hsiang, inflated with victory, began to swell.

Two days later, rumour reported that during the night a few covered cars had passed through Urga on their way to Kiachta, and that the Ochrana had been on its legs all night. In those cars the tearful wife and children of Feng were packed on a joy-ride to Moscow. Russia was making sure of binding this general to its cause by confiscating his family, so as to have him in its power.

This was how things stood when at last I left Urga in a *troika* with six horses. Four Chinese workmen, simple, decent fellows, joined me at the last moment, and stowed their bundles with a little money concealed therein, their hardly won savings of about twenty dollars, amongst my cases. By the late afternoon we had got through the customs,

after spending the whole morning there, pestered by flies and Mongols. An hour later we passed the outposts of the Chinese quarter with its low mud houses and curved roofs, which lay as a colony apart, about four miles to the east of the town. It was inhabited by Chinese only, with their Chinese or Mongolian wives, and in the dirty streets one could observe a good deal of mixed blood. A Chinese colony lying like an island in the midst of the realm of the Golden Horde, it was decaying on the once strong structure of its past history. China the powerful was now humbled, and wading through the mire of bottomless corruption. The Mongols had freed themselves from this great tottering empire and become an independent republic, with the result that this little colony led the existence of outlaws without any right of appeal to their country; and their morals were being rapidly diluted and adapted to those of their former subordinates. The grandly planned temple of this settlement, prompted by the urge to establish their own gods on alien soil, was crumbling away into sand-covered ruins. Any Chinese now going into Mongolia did so at the risk of his life, which China could no longer protect. Laws of civilized culture, such as result from an ordered State, had been violated and broken by separatist generals with their gangs of robbers armed to the teeth, who terrorized the land into a cheap semblance of order. They sprang up like mushrooms after rain, and changed their minds according to circumstances; their saloon cars carried their mistresses, not only Chinese, but also Russian women, who had been swept before the tide of Red revolution and washed up first into Manchuria and then on into China. The unbridled and brutal instincts of a few individuals had succeeded in destroying these fine structures of ancient culture. In the same way that they tortured their overworked animals, with the same vandalism with which they handled their cars and withered them into skeletons, they

had now touched the heart's blood of the people. The Waichiapu, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose officials had received no pay for years, was like an arm severed from the mutilated body of the State of China, still quivering in reflex action, seemingly alive. It continued to receive notes and protests from foreign Powers, but had no notion what to do with them. For the last two years there was no guiding power whatever of the Chinese Constitution. The last President, who had bribed and bought the Senate for his re-election to the tune of two thousand dollars Mex. per head, withdrew with his hoard of several millions into the safe regions of the Japanese Concession in Tientsin, where he was under the protection of the ex-Territorials, and the Chinese State found it much cheaper to do without a head. In consequence of the attack on the blue Shanghai-Peking express, which took place in May of 1923, when a marauding band of two thousand soldiers dragged thirty-five tourists, chiefly Americans, into the pathless hilly country of Shantung, America and England both threatened sharp reprisals if any harm came to a single one of these people at the hands of this cut-throat gang. An English missionary who offered resistance had been shot on the spot. The bandits thus showed the gravity of the consequences that might be expected if the ransom they tried to extort should not be forthcoming, rightly surmising that the united Foreign Powers would not fail to force and threaten the Government, and so accelerate indirectly the fulfilment of the demands of these bandits. No one troubled about the fate of the Chinese who had also been captured. These were put to the most cruel torture from the first, and wrote many heartrending letters to their relatives and friends, begging them to buy them free from the hands of these brutes. A curtain of silence has spread over the fate of those who succumbed to this terrible and cunning cruelty. Cheng-Li, one of the

Chinese prisoners for whom the ransom money was safely deposited in a prearranged spot, was picked up the next morning wandering about in a state of idiocy. The nipples of his breast had been roasted daily over the flame of a candle. And this was but one of the hundred and forty-odd Chinese that were kidnapped.

The ultimatum which demanded the immediate freedom of the thirty-five tourists enforced by threats of drastic intervention in China on the part of the united Powers, was delivered into the hands of the Waichiapu, which in these urgent and pressing circumstances was quite powerless, and did not care to take the responsibility of a much greater and worse calamity upon its shoulders. In its perplexity, compelled to immediate action, to prevent the instant shipwreck of China's drifting and leaderless junk, it stepped beyond its prestige into direct negotiation with the bandits. Considering the circumstances and its own complete impotence against the extortionate brutality of these robbers, it had to acknowledge and accept without conditions the demands of both sides. As the demanded ransom was unattainable anywhere – a bargain of the worst type was made with the marauders, which illustrates the rapid decline of China into complete helplessness. The leader of the bandits was offered a post as Governor with absolute powers, his subordinates were given the rank of officers, sergeants, and soldiers with well-paid posts, for the delicacy of the situation prohibited any idea of a categorical punishment of these brigands. And the bitter pill of a sharp reprimand from the European Powers had to be swallowed by China as well, without the possibility of any protest. The insult which laid bare to all the world the fallen state of European prestige, which even bandits could attack, led to a further note in which the Foreign Powers unanimously demanded not only the freedom of their citizens, but a heavy sum for damages. The sum of $90,000 was

asked for the English citizen who was shot, and $500 per head for the prisoners for the first three days of their imprisonment, and $100 per day for the following week, with an increase at the rate of $50 per day for any further period. England and America tried in this way to raise once more a strong foothold above the Asiatic quicksands which threatened to engulf everything. Such happenings were the natural result of the export of arms by European Powers to the East, which certain sinister elements carried on with shady business instincts, to the general detriment; but this fact was buried in silence. The embryonic cause of such cases as the above was augmented by the systematic propaganda against Germany of the English, American, and French Press in the East at the time of the Great War. The Chinese were taught to hate all Germans blindly, which they, being Asiatics, were incapable of comprehending. They could tell the national distinctions of white skins as little as an average European can distinguish the racial difference between the Chinese of the north and of the south. All that the word Chinese covers here, was there covered by the word European, and if a Chinaman was allowed to spit into the face of a German, to insult a German woman by word or deed, he did it thoroughly, with all the hatred he harboured for all Europeans generally in his heart.

But it was quite beyond his grasp that this rough and disrespectful behaviour should only be permitted him against a certain section of the white race, and it merely served to lower his respect for the white race generally. Here the same procedure was taking place as amongst the dogs of Mongolia, which, having once tasted human flesh, even the flesh of corpses, attack the living without any fear or hesitation. The occurrence in Linchin brought about the rapid decline of European prestige in China. If a spark of respect still lingered in the Chinese mentality

today, two years later, the balance had turned to the opposite direction. Most of the Russian women collected in Harbin and Shanghai had become prostitutes. Life was bitter and competition keen. The women of the white race cavilled at nothing, and offered themselves to the first Chinaman encountered, often for the cost of a frugal meal. Russian women were cheaper than Chinese women of the lowest rank. Those homeless creatures had Chinese certificates, were insulted and beaten in the streets, and took all in smiling servility. Russians in Chinese uniform served in Chang So-lin's army, or did the work of low coolies. China spat and trod on them, and abused its privilege towards these unhappy and unprotected ones to its utmost. Behind all this lay the mere perverse pleasure of degrading the white people. Europe had lost the trump card of its prestige, and the melodies piped by the Soviet, with their altruistic harmonies, did the rest. The wild game of chance, of separatist politics, within the boundaries of Europe, destroyed allied combined action to save and restore the lost face of the white races in China. Russian influences began to undermine the edifice of English interests in China and India. Japan and America waited in the background for its welcome fall to grab and annex what they could. England, which urged concerted action, was rebuffed on all sides. Japan withdrew, with the polite and oily grin of its gold-embossed equine teeth and the veiled reflections of spectacles, covering the cunning gleam of its eyes, under the ready-made excuse of not wishing to be mixed up in the concerns of China. This attitude brought friends, but was in reality only an acknowledgment which Japan could well afford to make owing to its geographical situation. In three to four days its troops, long prepared and in readiness, could be landed on Chinese soil, whereas England, forced to make previous lengthy arrangements, could not conceal its intentions so easily. The Japanese

were quite content with the knowledge that Chang So-lin from his base at Mukden, and in Manchuria, was running fairly straight in their interests, being supported by their capital and supplied by them with armaments. Had Chang So-lin, bribed by a higher bidder, acted contrary to Japanese interests, no doubt Japan's attitude would have been different. In strengthening and preparing for an aggressive position in North China he was also partly financed by English capital; England, because of its interests in China, could temporarily find no other course to follow than to back the doubtful powers of a Chang-So-lin. Although it is maintained even to-day that the Chinese invented gunpowder, they had never adapted it to more than a childish matchlock. Europe possessed the most destructive arms, machines of the most uncanny description whose existence had certainly never been fathered by the East. Now European secrets were spreading into Oriental regions, and becoming a menace to the Occident, which was no longer able to trump its opponents' best card.

What a prospect! European prestige destroyed, and China stiff with the most modern weapons! Chinese students had been dipping their flat noses into Western civilizations, and now raised their voices in Chinese matters, and were easily caught by the bait of the rat-catching politics of the Soviet. The increasing inner decay of Russia brought as a necessary consequence a virulent external policy destructive of any order, seeking only to pull all the world down to the sad level of Russian conditions; thus alone could the instability of the Russian Constitution find a little solidity. Borodin and Karakhan, those Russian champions, threw constant sops of altruistic morality to the Chinese intelligentsia, of which their own politics showed the least traces. These were baits which were blindly and greedily seized. When the Russian *ménage* changed hands, the new regime at once tried to cadge friends outside,

by a seeming restoration of the regions acquired, resigning these in the corruptest conditions, reserving no special rights to itself, such as the foreign Powers had enjoyed since the successful suppression of the Boxer insurrection in China.

Russia tried to disguise its inner and outer weakness by adopting the hypocritical attitude of sacrifice and goodwill, slinking into the households of others, with further intent of robbery and exploitation. 'Ambassador' Karakhan declared: 'The influence of Russia in China is not the result of propaganda, but is the rèsult of Russia's justice towards China, not in words only but in deeds. . . . If our crime consists in our upright policy and goodwill . . . then we can only be proud of this crime and declare ourselves guilty.' The seed of these dragon's teeth began to germinate in China.

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Presently we crossed the wooden bridge that spans the Tola, and, as darkness was rapidly approaching, I decided to camp on the left bank of the river. All the oppressive weight, the unbearable atmosphere of imprisonment and lack of freedom of the last long weeks was suddenly lifted, and the worst nightmare terrors fell away. Freedom of action was once more mine. A week ago I had given up all hope of ever attaining freedom, now I held it with both hands, and for the moment Fate seemed to embody the Divine Will as well as my own. I was still in the territory of outer Mongolia, but the realization of having escaped from the meshes of dangerous nets would accelerate my further steps to the utmost. With the first grey signs of dawn we broke up camp and were well on our way, always following the telegraph posts of the Urga-Kalgan line, stretching across the plains to the furthest horizon in distant perspective. Over the wide undulating country the low-

hanging clouds of the monsoon hurried unceasingly. At night the wind shrilled over the wires, howling and shrieking like a gang of tortured fiends. Travelling showers drenched us to the skin between intervals of sunshine, as the hurrying clouds passed on towards a distance that lay flooded in light. Grassland stretched before us in all directions, hundreds of miles of it without the sign of human habitation.

Every new day saw our small camp ready to resume its road into the endless distance of this undulating plateau. Eagles wheeled high into the vast skies until they dwindled into small specks, like larks. At times they gathered over our heads, sinking low in wide spirals, with angular movements of their outstretched necks, and alighted on the ground in heraldic attitudes, reflecting the sunlight from the black sheen of their plumage. If an arm was swung at them, they rose heavily like torn and jagged rags on the breeze, turning upwards in narrow, slanting curves and graceful loops above us. Bits of meat thrown up to them they caught by an instantaneous drop to such close quarters that one could hear the air whistling through their feathers and feel the wind of their wings beat on one's face. Marmots waddled their hind-quarters in curious lolloping movements as they hurried across our path, and then paused at the entrance of their earths, sitting erect in comic posture with hanging forepaws, emitting sharp whistles through their long, rodent teeth. That was all the life to be seen on these wide plains. A few gaunt skeletons sprawled here and there, curved ribs lying about in detached disarray, left thus after some hungry beast's meal; shins and knuckles with the bluish half-moon of the hoof; skulls with elongated jaws and teeth; twisted vertebræ spreading wide the curved ribs like withered and dried palm leaves. These were dumb witnesses of some tragedy of animal life vanishing by slow degrees upon these wide horizons. If the sharp teeth of the beasts of prey were less alert and busy, these stretches of

grassland would be covered with the remains of animal corpses, for in the cold dry air of this high plateau, with its extremes of temperature, they would require years to decompose. One hard winter often suffices to destroy wandering herds to the last unit, the unprotected animals succumbing to hunger and cold, and the Mongol owner taking it as a God-sent fate. He will not stir a hand to gather fodder on the summer pastures for the hard months of winter, or to build a shelter for his flocks even in well-wooded regions. And yet the wealth of a Mongol consists solely in his herds and is reckoned by the heads of his cattle. When luck was kind, a spell of good weather, and the rare addition of a season free from disease, would double his herds in a year. But these conditions seldom occur together. A wealthy Mongol possesses about 10,000 sheep, 2000 oxen, 500 camels, and 500 ponies – approximately worth £25,000; but the profit and loss on his wealth depends entirely on the vagaries of the weather. A single severe winter, or the unchecked horrors of a spreading epidemic, may destroy the whole of his wealth in a month. Each animal that falls ill means the going down of his credit, and the Mongol, with his resourceless mentality, stands by helpless; or if he tries to propitiate the gods, he turns to the lamas, the representatives of God on earth. All his faith is bound to their occult horoscope. Blind to any obvious and practical interpretation of circumstances, his world is divided between God and the devil. . . .

After many days' travelling the plain became gradually more barren and sandy, with grass in meagre and wiry tufts. We had approached the edge of the Gobi. During March and April stormy winds from the west drive the sand in waves against the eastern border of these steppes. Great lakes of sand form in the hollows, the surfaces of which are all corrugated with wonderful patterns like the rippled surface of wind-swept waters. The next monsoon

will sweep its obliterating touch over all these patterns, and pass on leaving a changed landscape behind it. With its strong lungs the monsoon wind sucks out these hollows and carries the sand elsewhere, drawing grass to the surface in some places, and burying it in others. But slowly and steadily the sandy waves eat their way a little further into the grassy plain every century.

At times the country wears the appearance of sand-dunes near the sea, with wiry grass on the wind-swept ridges. Like bright stones come suddenly to life, lizards flit in a zigzag course, and vanish into the tiny dark points of their burrows. Great buzzards sit here and there on the telegraph posts. Where the sand lies deep, one seems with each forward step to slide backwards, and the trace of one's footstep is silted up at once. The traces made by the wheels of our carriage vanish immediately and progress becomes difficult. It is hard work trying to advance through this loose wind-sifted sand. I catch myself thinking with envy of camels skimming with their sponge-padded feet and spreading elastic tread over the sand, leaving traces that look like the flat imprints of plates.

After a while we reach firm dusty ground again, with sparse vegetation here and there. Hard greyish-green grass grows in clumps, which takes on the appearance of a herd of shining round-backed tortoises sunning themselves on the leaden beach of some prehistoric sea. Science presupposes this region to be the cradle and birthplace of life on our globe. A little spade-work, it tells us, would discover under a shallow surface the petrified remains of unimaginable monsters.

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The more we pushed towards the south-west, the more sandy grew our surroundings. It is strange how quickly

atmosphere responds to each change on the face of the earth. Towards evening the whole district lay like a bronze relief, rust-brown with violet lights, under skies striped with delicate pink which deepened into glowing red, veiled by a rising curtain of violet-blue haze. The desert lay spread like a sombre negative dream. Long wiry blades of grass pierced through the sandy undulations. Over flat levels cows idly wandered, finding little comfort. A few jurts appeared in this copper landscape, and the mud wall of a yard lay like a box that had been broken open, close beside the line of telegraph posts. Men on horses passed and repassed between us and the horizon, eyeing us as we crept slowly through the flat copper hollows. We had now reached Uddhe, the frontier post of outer Mongolia. Mongolian soldiers, of the kind I had learnt to know and hate too well in Urga, surrounded us with cunning pestering gaze. Suddenly a bit of Urga seemed to have cropped up, recapturing and destroying the freedom of the last weeks. From the faces surrounding me I learnt that conditions had meanwhile grown worse. All the sombre trouble almost forgotten under free skies again rose up around me. High tension was everywhere, and at a distance I observed a regular military camp. The frontier was declared closed to any further egress from Uddhe, and we were bidden to turn back. The Russian in charge of the telegraph station told us that orders to let no one out had arrived only the night before from Urga. An argument developed. I emphasized my non-Russian nationality and kept referring to the paper in which the Ochrana had given me freedom to leave the country. The Russian acknowledged, fortunately, that there was no special mention of me in his new orders, so with his aid I managed with great trouble to outwit the Mongols. For the last two weeks a row of cars with freight for China had been left stranded in abandoned dejection in front of this mud-coloured station

building. Their chauffeurs, after dismantling the magnetos, had gone back to Urga. But my one idea was to go on, to continue the drive into the unknown; the most impossible of all courses seemed to be a return to Urga, come what might. None knew what was hanging over us, and even rumour had reached its limit; but the weight of tremendous tension was in the atmosphere, and God's good earth seemed covered and polluted by human corruption fighting for mere existence.

The dirty ochre-coloured forms of these ugly soldiers with bandolier and curved Russian cossack swords under their arms, stood detached in the copper-coloured atmosphere, brutal, stupid, impudent, and aggressive. Quite unconnected with their surroundings they stood as if conjured up by some evil-smelling spirit. Out of mere instinct to torture, and to satisfy their idle curiosity, they insisted on opening and examining my luggage. As soon as I opened my hand-trunk containing wearing apparel and some necessary articles of toilet, the soldiers behaved like a flock of monkeys coming upon the deserted camp of some expedition. My shaving mirror was passed from hand to hand, while each in turn grinned into it and rubbed his fingers over the surface. Its magnifying power was an unsolved mystery that each tried to unravel. The soap was broken to pieces, the shaving-brush was passed over their skin. The medicine-chest was minutely explored; pills poured into the palms of their hands and licked and sniffed at; ointments rubbed on the rough sores of their hands and bodies without question as to their uses. Everything was tumbled out into the dust and trampled upon. I tried to get out of the situation by giving away all that I could – shaving mirror, soap, underclothes, and finally the no longer needed trunk. Thereupon they started to quarrel amongst themselves, trying to exchange the things they had obtained, or to sell or buy them for shining dollar

coins which they drew out of the sweat-begrimed folds of their clothing. No one took any notice of me, so I pushed on and managed thus to pass the last frontier posts of the Mongolian Republic.

Evening began to descend in violet and copper tones, and then sank into a night which grew more and more blue over our heads. After midnight we at last turned from the path at a well-hole, and in a petrol tin drew up some dirty water. All the country was suffering from drought. In the boundless space of this crystal-clear night glittering stars floated, and we seemed to move, detached from all gravity or form, surrounded by this grand procession, until dawn once more startled all forms out of their sleep, and it seemed that grass was once again struggling against sand.

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The extremes of temperature between day and night level down as the plateau sinks imperceptibly. The view no longer has the clarity of the Mongolian landscape; the atmosphere grows denser and warmer, the light loses its cool blue tone. The Chinese begin to recognize their own native country.

THROUGH HELL

We now approached the first of Feng Yu-hsiang's stations on the road from Kalgan to Uddhe: these stations were erected at intervals for the use of his munitions transport. The one we approached stood out bleak and detached from the bare landscape, with new door and window frames in its two-storeyed buildings, and was already infested with legions of certain flat bloodthirsty insects, that came out in brown battalions at night, and whose corpses, roasted in milky drops of candle grease, littered the ground, unless they had been squashed in red smears against the chalky walls. For the last few weeks this station had lain deserted by the usual passing Chinese and Russian chauffeurs. The man in charge told us that transport had been suspended for some unknown reason. A last batch going to Kalgan had hastily filled cool water into its hot radiators and then vanished with the greatest speed over the horizon; it had never returned from Kalgan. In the afternoon, while talking to me, this man suddenly ran away and stared into the distance, his eyes shining with eager curiosity. Over the edge of the horizon five gleaming points slid single file, and wound along the distant path, stirring up a long streamer of dust. As they turned, the sun reflected on their wind-screens and flashed at us like heliograms for a moment; and soon the humming of their motors made the picture more vivid still. A few minutes later, a dozen well-clad Chinese gentlemen with fans and dark sun-goggles filled the walled courtyard, busily beating the dust from their black and grey silk garments. They

shouted into the kitchen while eagerly sipping some hot tea. Food appeared as if by magic, and was handed to all. Holding their bowls to their mouths, they dragged the long, pale noodles in, aided by their chopsticks, and gurgled and smacked all down as quickly as possible, and then each paid his copper pieces and vanished. After weeks this was the first contact with the interior of China, in which meanwhile much of importance had taken place. Dolo-Nor had been overrun by the advancing soldiers of Chang So-lin, pushing towards Kalgan. Feng Yu-hsiang's buffer line was hopelessly broken in; a few shots had been enough to accomplish this.

To the north of Kalgan the long, shadowy feelers of Chang So-lin's hurrying cavalry were advancing in wide reaches, and from Feng Yu-hsiang's fortress of sand all hope fled headlong. The bulk of his army escaped from the threatening noose by forced marches to the north-west. Those in authority ran their hurrying Buicks along the very edge of the shadows advancing danger cast before, towards outer Mongolia. Kalgan now lay helplessly exposed and the sinister elements in Feng's army, realizing this, threw away their caps, and marched with Chang So-lin's troops against Kalgan. Discipline and loyalty in their master's service was no part of their make-up, and the expected looting attracted their cupidity.

The next day about noon three bright spots ran over the horizon trembling in midday heat, and crossed the distance in tearing haste. They seemed to want to pass to one side, but then changed their direction and came straight at us. On the bundles and benzine tins strapped to the sides of the cars, heavily armed Mongolian soldiers sat, who, as they approached, drew ugly Mauser pistols out of their cases. As the first car halted a few paces from us the curtains were withdrawn from within for a moment. What I saw in that fraction of a moment remained indelibly engraven

on my mind's eye: someone who sat behind the curtain and yet was visible! As the reaction of a quick glance into the sun's disc repeats itself on closed lids, so this moment's sight of the indistinct form of a head seemed to stand on the photographic lens of my eye. I knew in a flash that the owner was no other than General Feng Yu-hsiang himself. In the other cars Russians in uniforms sat, and one or two Chinese in plain clothes. They eyed me with frigid hostility. However, I stood my ground quietly, while my companions, on being called, approached the cars, full of curiosity. They were questioned as to whether they had seen Chang So-lin's cavalry patrols on their way. We were told that the telegraph line had been cut behind us the day before.

Although we had wandered all the time in sight of these telegraph posts, we had not noticed the least movement. This news made us realize that our weal or woe lay in the hands of an arbitrary fate. We could now only advance; all retreat was cut off, and this might prove our salvation or the reverse. We knew what falling into the hands of Chinese soldiers would mean. They herded together from inborn cowardice, and by the safety of numbers were incited to unspeakable cruelties, in a true Asiatic complex of character.

The scenery, towards evening, appeared like the solidified undulating swell of a boundless ocean, on which we drifted about, shipwrecked creatures, automatically trying to keep afloat as long as possible, yet feeling that at any moment we might find ourselves suddenly overwhelmed in irretrievable disaster.

That night the gleam of a concealed light wandered across the horizon behind us, and we hastened to leave the path. Grey dust lay thick and heavy, and impeded our progress, while the horses became restless and flurried. The gleam of light seemed to search towards each side and then go out again, only to reappear once more in irregular

flashes, moving to and fro, growing stronger and rising higher out of the darkness. Though our ears were strained to the utmost, the night remained silent, ankle-deep dust deadening all sounds. We could not gauge the distance, and only sought to escape into the darkness before us, till suddenly a dazzling eye shone over the horizon, mocking at our struggle for secrecy. The spaces of the night were swallowed up, and beyond us dense darkness stood like a brown wall at which we were running, as into a *cul-de-sac*, at the mercy of this glaring eye. It picked out the shadows of the uneven ground, and at last the purring of a machine came to us. This gigantic eye seemed to have fastened the hypnotic power of its pupil on us, and to draw us out of the enveloping darkness. In a few minutes we were bound to be overtaken, and might have saved ourselves the trouble of this last move. I cursed the heavy dust that hampered our advance and stepped into the shadow of the carriage lit up in billows of dust, as a car came throbbing up. The glare was thrown full upon us, and the car stopped. An exclamation, a silence, and then Russian and Mongolian voices. In a moment I had crossed the dazzling light and covered it with my hand. There was a noise like iron hitting iron, and then steps fell into the deep dust and came dragging towards me, bow-legs and a pointed cap showing through a blur of dust; then other forms appeared in the gloom, and Mongolian soldiers, armed to the teeth, surrounded us. The barrel of a machine-gun, partly covered by a sheepskin, stood at firing level on the car, its thin iron mouth gaping roundly into our faces. One of the Mongols, while relieving himself, spoke to my Chinese, who all stood huddled close together. The Russian chauffeur filled cold water from a benzine tin into the steaming orifice of his radiator, and then came over to me. A fresh gleam of light appeared on the horizon, which the Mongols noticed with satisfaction. My fears, which a few

minutes ago had driven us from the path, were fortunately groundless. These Mongols had left Uddhe on the Mongolian frontier early that morning with orders to bring back at all costs, and in any circumstances, a caravan of three hundred bullock carts which had been on the way for weeks. They looked as if they would serve out unhealthy rations to anyone who withstood them. From the slit eyes in their lumpish faces a lust of battle shone with the hard glint of merciless cruelty. They could well hold their own against the more cowardly Chinese soldiers who flayed helpless burghers alive in sadistic cruelty, but ran like hares when it was a question of saving their own skins; who shunned their adversary in the open field, but threw themselves, with their terror-inspiring weapons, on peaceful countryfolk. These Mongols would scarcely get the chance to fight which they sought, for such Chinese vanguard patrols as they might find were not strong enough to encounter their arms, and would cautiously avoid them.

Our position was different. We were travelling through dangers which in the event of an encounter we could not stand up to. Cigarettes and an unresisting acceptance of any rough handling might help us to get off with a black eye or so. The threads of our destiny were indeed in the hands of Fate! And I was almost sorry when these Mongols and their weapons vanished from our horizon, since with them disappeared also some chance of safety.

My Chinese were weak-jointed with fright, and the one rifle and Mauser pistol which I carried could only make matters worse for us. Therefore any show of resistance would be folly, and I was forced to adopt a policy of caution. I was prepared for an attack the very next day, and was even surprised that it did not occur; and our journey dragged evenly through long days and nights without any change. At last one day, after the sun had passed the zenith

and had begun to go down over a rusty red landscape, parched like a baked brick, we brought our dust-laden conveyance to some mud walls, cracked by drought, surrounding a Chinese dwelling. Not far away a row of camels was marching slowly towards the mirror of a small tank, swaying the curves of their thickly furred necks forwards, and holding erect their small, disdainful heads. About thirty Chinese were loitering in this yard with sour and bored faces, their hands tucked into the sleeves of their wadded jackets. They had all been stranded here by the unexpected interruption of their journey to Kalgan. The car that had brought them from Urga decided to go no further because of the uncertainty of everything, and had returned some time ago into Mongolia. These Chinese had preferred, like myself, to take the risk of getting on – though now they seemed to regret their choice, and were trying to make the best of the situation, for there seemed no chance of help. The road between Urga and Kalgan, once worn smooth by traffic, now lay desolate in the deathlike silence that preceded the storm approaching from the east. Feng Yu-hsiang having cleared out and betaken himself and his hopes through Mongolia to Moscow. There, we were told, he intended taking up the calling of his ancestors, working as a simple tailor amongst the poor, and studying the will-to-power which overnight had arisen against an antiquated organization and an obsolete mode of life. How far he would realize that Russia's altruism, while decapitating the world, was only created as a subterfuge to veil a corrupt will-to-power, time alone would show.

What was Asia driving at? It was sacrificing the happiness of its God-given culture of soul, and yielding its wide territory as a battle-ground for an alien cause. The lamb seeking the wolf on one side, to beg for help against the wolf's attack on the other.

Our path carried us through scenes once enlivened by the constant traffic of caravans and cars, but where our cart was now the only moving object on the wide horizon. Two days later, towards 1.30 a.m., we reached the next wayside station. It lay dark and deserted, and as we brought our carriage into the yard we heard only the vague echo of our movements thrown back to us from the encircling walls. Shreds of paper hung in tatters from the wooden rails of the windows, torn by hailstorms, like flesh hanging from weather-browned ribs. The doorway of the chief building gaped wide and black like the mouth in a mummified head. In this drab mud house the heartbeat of life seemed to have given place to silence, and night lay grey and pale on its weather-beaten walls. My Chinese companions pressed close to me, trembling, while I got out a lantern and lit it. As it sent out its weak, narrow gleam, our shadows ran like long fingers along the ground into the darkness. We all looked tired and worn from the terrible fatigue and privations of the journey. I was startled by the hollowness of my companions' cheeks, on which the dust of the journey, mixed with sweat, lay in coagulated patches, while at each side of their mouths a perpendicular line ran as though cut by a sharp knife. Their eyes had a dry glitter, and their lips were hard and shrivelled. Sleep fell upon us as we walked or stood, blotting out the conscious world. For weeks our strained nerves had been on tension, while our bodies seemed to shrink and shrivel daily under the heat of the sun, as water holes do in a desert. Our horses too were in a sad plight of exhaustion, with hollow rumps under their gaunt ribs, and a feverish breath blowing from dry nostrils, as they stood drooping and limp.

I was about to enter the door with the lantern, when one of the Chinese in sudden terror caught my sleeve and brought his mouth so close to my ear that I could hear the

excited beat of his pulses between the syllables. '*Chunkuze*,'[1] he whispered, and his questioning glance ran in the direction of his outstretched finger. Five paces away along the wall lay three blue and red narrow-seated saddles, over which the flank leather under the straps of the heavy stirrups was bent like stiff cardboard. These, I saw at a glance, were saddles from inner Mongolia. The place was, therefore, not deserted, though there was no sign of life in this black box-like emptiness; but the silence of night seemed insufficient to account for the terror of these Chinese. I lifted the lantern above my head and peered into the blackness of the chamber, which was smoke-begrimed and filled with the smell of cold soot. Nothing! An empty fireplace with a crooked chimney pipe; a few charred logs lying on the hearth. That was all! There was a soft slippery something under the soles of my boots, and when I turned the light on to this, I found myself standing on a fresh sheepskin spread out to dry. The dark blood on it was moist and sticky where I touched it, and stood in slippery solidifying pools, while the revolting odour of cooling flesh rose to my nostrils. I looked round at the Chinaman behind me, and there was panic in his wide stare, for he too stood in the centre of another blood-moist carpet whose softness and smell had rooted him to the spot. Then I entered the next room in the hope of finding the solution to this riddle. These hides had evidently been skinned not more than an hour or two ago . . . where were the people who had done this? The next chamber, intended for guests, was also empty but for a few torn sleeping-mats on the brick *podium* of the *chan*, and the walls above were patterned by the ugly dark blood-smears of squashed vermin. Millions of these wretched insects no doubt lurked in every crevice of the building, falling silently from the walls on to those sleeping below, and devouring them all impartially. A

[1] *Chunkuze*: robbers, literally "red-beards."

bundle of old rags lay thrown into a corner with a stump of dirty candle, and close by stood a rusty benzine tin, with a little stale iridescent water in it.

I returned to the yard and crossed to the smaller building at the side, where a closed door hung half off its hinges, scraping deep into the dust like a brake. This low chamber was empty too. Thousands of bugs had been squashed on the walls up to the very ceiling. I was just going out again in disgust, when I caught sight of a long-stemmed Chinese pipe on the window sill. The little brass bowl was slightly warm, and smelt of freshly smoked tobacco, so there was certainly someone about. From the yard I shouted aloud, and went down a narrow passage between the outer wall and the chief building which led to a wide space encompassed by walls, no doubt meant for the putting up of ponies. In the further corner I perceived a jurt with a faint light gleaming from under the closed door. This might perhaps solve the riddle. I went back to the yard, and armed my Chinese, one with a long-handled axe, another with a kitchen knife, a third with the gun; and then with a stone in an empty tin, I improvised a hellish racket of noise and shouting, as I returned and kicked vigorously at the door of the jurt, and cried, 'Open.' A breathless silence followed. I beat on the door with the butt of my revolver, and tried to look through the splits. Something pushed about inside, and the door began to open. With my revolver at full cock I looked in.

In the light of a flickering butter lamp which confused the shadows, three half-naked Mongols sat cowering like living devils. Over the top of their shaven foreheads their hair was twisted into a stalk which stood up about a hand high, and then spread out and hung down like a horsehair whisk. One had a harelip with two sharp teeth shining out in the triangular opening, so that he seemed to be in the act of continual silent laughter. They all wore thick

quilted trousers tucked into heavy folds and pushed into the tops of shabby canoe-shaped shoes, showing the wear and tear of much riding. Out of this centaur-like lower structure their bare waxen chests rose in helpless slouching indolence. From their right ears hung large fluted brass rings, giving the last sinister touch to their faces. Four Russian rifles hung on the wall wrapped in rags, also some belts with Russian military ammunition in the shallow pockets, several dirty sheepskin coats, and a Chinese soldier's grey shirt, evidently recently worn. I took especial notice of this shirt, for it was not likely that one of these Chakhars,[1] or Water-Mongols, had worn it. Those fur coats also belonged to others, for these men had spread their own on the ground, and sat upon them. On being asked as to whence they came and whither they were going, they obviously lied, saying they were Chakhar soldiers who guarded the station and hunted the bandits that swarmed in these regions. But though they tried to disguise the truth I soon fathomed the situation – these men were the left-behinds of a band of robbers who had gone out after booty, and might be back again before daybreak. These three had apparently lost their horses, and were waiting for fresh mounts from the next haul. Evidently there was a Chinese amongst the gang, which emphasized the fact that the very devil of mischief was abroad. We had surprised these three and, not knowing our strength, they had preferred to hide.

I deliberated for a moment. There was no moon. The country was being patrolled by a horde whose whereabouts we could not tell; we might run straight into their hands – it was better to wait here, whatever might happen between now and dawn. I looked at my watch – a quarter past two. I was exhausted, and my knees gave way with fatigue. All the helplessness of this journey, that depended on the luck

[1] Chakhar Mongols come from inner Mongolia.

of unforeseeable circumstances, fell upon me. Each step seemed to take us deeper into this invisible danger which showed its teeth behind us, as well as before.

I took down the rifles from the wall, the three raising no protest. They could not guess our weakness, and this action looked as if we were masters of the situation. Had they known! I pulled myself together, went round the corner of the house, and put the rifles in the empty kitchen; then squatted down in the yard with my back against the wall, meaning to keep awake and watchful of every movement in the vicinity, ready if necessary with my defence. My brave Chinese retired with the axe, kitchen knife, rifle, and the lantern, and barricaded themselves into the vermin-infested room with the crooked door, against any possible attack from without, leaving me outside in solitary meditation. Overhead the stars sparkled in boundless space, unbelievably bright in this crystal-clear night air. The whole cosmos seemed to be wheeling above me with its millions of stars. What a night! Yet full of uncertainty as to what the morning might bring. It was bitterly cold. From the wall the earth ran into darkness, all outline and horizon being lost. The profoundest silence reigned. Not far off, my conveyance bulked vaguely like some ghostly creature. On the torn paper shreds over the windows there was now and again a slight flicker of light. The hidden enemy within these walls had by now fallen silently upon its human prey. It scaled the walls with blood-thirsty determination, and fell down like a shower of brown rain pattering upon its victims. My cigarette glowed like a hungry eye. The stars wheeled in slow majesty . . . it was nearly 4 a.m. . . . how the dreary time dragged . . . I got up and walked about . . . but the noise of my own footsteps was startling, so I squatted down again with my back to the wall . . . A sudden jerk forward pulled me up from drifting down an age-long dream, and I fell

to watching the stars as they dropped slowly behind the edge of the wall. . . . All is relative, I thought – a café in Paris, a bandit in Asia, dogs in Urga, and that cursed Ochrana. . . .

. . . . .

Suddenly I awoke to find myself lying on one side, my face in slimy moisture, my cold, wet sheepskin feeling like sodden blotting-paper. It was bright daylight. Sleep must finally have overpowered me, and now all that went before seemed unreal – all the terrors of the night were like a happening in an evil dream, and appeared almost absurd in the fresh relief of the young daylight. Hope for a while once more filled the world with joy. Beside me cowered one of the figures of last night, wrapped in his sheepskin, and waiting for me to wake. He held a wooden bowl in his hands filled with some steaming milky brew which he handed to me with a grin. I poured its welcome warmth down my gullet, and staggered up with stiff knees and aching joints. Should I ever get under way again? However, I shouted to my Chinese, gave the Chakhar a few cigarettes, and returned the four rifles to him. A few minutes later we drove out of the yard, urging the horses to their utmost speed, and soon lost sight of this weird and dreadful place. Before us now lay a wide clean landscape, with no sign of life – miles and miles of sand and earth – calm and peaceful.

We dipped into a narrow defile, and it took all our strength to climb up again on the other side. The riding-horses had been harnessed to the cart, but they were exhausted and unwilling. When we had once more gained the top of a spur, we saw a speck of dust travelling towards us from behind. It was then half an hour before noon, the sun blazed down from a brazen sky, and the ground was like a slab of hot copper. I focussed my glasses on to this

speck, and saw it was a man riding straight at us. He swung his right arm in circles, and seemed to be urging on his pony with shouts that did not reach us. The pony threw its legs out in a wild gallop, and the distance between him and us diminished steadily. We had now gained a long, easy, downhill stretch, and we jogged along as quickly as we could move, so that our pursuer had his work cut out not to lose ground. He was leaning far over his saddle, and was flourishing his whip like one possessed; using every device to drive the devil into the legs of his mount, while he shouted to us to halt. But we were not to be persuaded, and drove our ponies for all we were worth. He was bound to overtake us, but I had every reason to distrust him and his intentions, for he came from the direction of our last night's resting place! His pony seemed fairly spent, and it was advisable to exhaust it to the uttermost, before we dealt with the rider. At last he approached near enough for me to observe him with my unaided eyes. I held my rifle in readiness and fired a shot into the air. The pony seemed to stagger when he forced it to gallop the last few hundred yards, while I jumped off the cart with my rifle and called a halt. Our pursuer was obviously of a mixed Chinese type like the peasants in the strip of Chinese territory that juts into Mongolia. He was unarmed, and wore a black quilted waistcoat. Horse and rider were utterly spent and labouring for breath; from the man's shaven forehead the sweat ran in a stream to his chin, and from the animal's shoulders and heaving rump in gleaming dark streaks, and as soon as, covered by my rifle, he brought it to a standstill, its head sank and its quarters fell into the slant given by a resting leg. The pony was exhausted. This ride of about twenty miles must have been done on a mount just in from heavy work, for it could not have so completely exhausted a fresh animal. With whistling breath the Chinaman demanded our immediate return with him to

last night's station. He said the district was infested by robbers and unsafe, and he came with the Governor's orders to fetch us back. My Chinese in their abject stupidity would have fallen straight into this clumsy trap. But I knew those robbers were bound to return once their night's work was done, and I had expected them to show up. This man was surely one of them. They could not have returned until some hours after our departure, on tired ponies most likely, and unable to undertake the pursuit at once, so they sent this man with a plausible lie to fetch us back. Being now in the majority, and prepared for our reception, the rest would be child's play to them. I saw the Asiatic cunning with which they would have hoodwinked my guileless Chinese, and realized that a gang, especially if not in overwhelming numbers, would not care to go to work in broad daylight in the open country. I ordered this fellow to dismount at once, or I would shoot the pony, his greatest asset, from under him, and I pointed my barrel at the creature's rump ready to fire. With a curse he threw himself off, fury in his bloodshot eyes – he had drawn a blank! I ordered the Chinese to unsaddle the pony, and indicated to the bandit that the least movement on his part would be his end. He had no means of escape. We harnessed his pony to our cart, and he was free to return on foot if he wished, which would take him at least five hours, and then another five hours must elapse before his gang could overtake us should they decide to do so. By that time we might have reached the next wayside station, and possibly be in the beat of a rival gang of robbers. This fellow now stood forlorn in the dust under the blazing sun, and shook his fists at us, as we jolted away – but soon he thought better of it and stooped to pick up the cigarettes thrown at his feet. As we moved off I watched him dwindling gradually to a mere speck, soon to be swallowed by the immensity of the wide horizon.

Again the sun sank in deep red and violet haze and the short gloaming was swallowed up by the night. The pony we had taken from the bandit was so spent that we had to tie it to the back of the cart where it dragged on its halter with stretched head, as if it could scarcely move, and when it had to trot, it threw its legs anyhow in uneven steps. I regretted that animals and men had no language in common; this poor creature might be able to tell some terrible stories, for he had carried incarnate fiends of hell on his back. I looked at the straps of his bridle to see what they were made of, and asked my interpreter what human hide looked like; but he gave me a queer glance as if he had guessed my thoughts, and made no answer. By two o'clock the next morning we had reached the next station without any further incident. A new wing had been added to the old building, and across the road lay another new edifice, all built during the last year under Feng Yu-hsiang's orders. A few jurts lay beyond. The house was made of sun-dried clay, and looked leaden grey in the semi-darkness; for the night, though without a moon, was strangely luminous. We found the gate to the yard surrounding the chief building bolted from within, and there was no answer to our shouting. I could see a dim light in the house through the crevices in the door, though our knocking brought no sign of response. So I climbed over the wall by aid of our cart. As I let myself down on the other side I noticed in the middle of the yard someone stretched in the dust apparently asleep – but the position arrested my attention and gave me a queer feeling – it was so like a doll. The head of one of my Chinese then appeared over the wall like a pale disc, and I got him to hand down the rifle to me, and went to the gate, lifted the cross-beam, and threw open one of its doors. In the house all was silent, and the body sprawling in the yard was that of a dead Chinaman, lying with its face buried in the dust. On turning it over, I was

startled by its loose-jointedness, just a form of flabby, lifeless flesh, like a doll stuffed with sawdust. Its face was encrusted with black mud and dust. I listened at the door of the house – but no sound was to be heard. Cautiously I examined the wooden bars of the shutters which had paper pasted across inside, hoping to find a hole through which to get a glimpse; but finding none I drew my knife, and gently cut a triangle into the paper, and turned it down. I could see two candles alight inside, and in the corner within range of my view several Chinese sat along the wall with knees drawn up, staring straight before them, and listening in abject fear. In front of them lay a heap of rags and clothes tossed about. I called my men, who approached with frightened side glances at the corpse, and knocked at the door. Those within may have recognized the voice of a foreigner, for the door was opened a few inches and a pair of eyes, full of doubt and fear, peered out. There were about twelve Chinese inside. Some lay on the *chan* and turned towards us, but did not rise. My Chinese all began to talk at once as they looked at the disarray in this crowded and stifling room. These men between their words of reply sank back into horrified silence. The interpreter drank in all that was said. In his excitement he had forgotten me, and tumbled his questions out as quickly as he could, while the others listened with greedy eagerness. One of the Chinese rose, and began to collect his scattered rags with the aid of a stump of burning candle. It appeared that a gang of robbers had driven these twelve Chinese into this chamber with blows and threats, and then had ransacked everything, pillaging them to the skin. Some had been beaten and slashed across their faces with horse-whips – those lay on the *chan*. One with a terribly swollen lip and a black eye was holding a wet rag to it with shaking hands. My blood began to boil. Why had I let that wretched villain escape yesterday instead of blowing his

brains out? Clemency to such men now seemed a crime. There appear to have been fourteen robbers, as far as the excited Chinese could count. Two stayed outside holding the ponies. The corpse lying in the yard was the host of this station, with whom they had come to blows and whose skull they had beaten in. Scarcely a quarter of an hour before we arrived they left in the greatest haste, after ravaging the place for two hours and gobbling up all the food. I was relieved that our approach had at least disturbed these demons at their sinister work, though strange to say, we had again not seen the least sign of movement anywhere within view. This treacherous cowardice ran like a silent shadow, one could not tell whence it came, or whither it went. While this talk was going on my attention was drawn by some other sound. From behind a door at the back of this room I seemed to hear a curious, intermittent wailing . . . then it was gone . . . and again it came distinctly from the black tunnel-like passage, which led to the kitchen. None of the Chinese dared to look round as I went through that door. The thin wailing was most piteous, sounding like the suction of a pipe. In the kitchen there were a few black pots and kettles on the hearth, a few china bowls with the remains of food, and chopsticks laid across them. A fire glowed feebly and sent a flickering gleam on to the beaten mud floor. A stump of candle was burning on the edge of a table and weeping tallow tears. On the *chan* built close to the hearth lay the figure of a man with a cloth thrown over his body and his legs drawn up. I called to him, and laid my hands on his quivering ankle. He did not notice, but went on emitting that terrible monotonous high whimper, like wind in the chimney; so I returned to the other room for the interpreter, to see if some aid could be rendered, my ears torn and tortured by this dreadful wailing. The interpreter shrank from me, and refused to come. That

man was bound to die, he said, for the robbers had flayed him (he choked over the words, and began to cough) in search of his hidden money! This monotonous wail clawed at one's brain. Disgust and horror choked me, and I felt like one who is being mercilessly tossed upon a rough sea. And then a flame of fury shot through me – I could not understand these people standing and sitting round me, and enduring such horror with abject cowardice. Why, why had I let that man escape yesterday? No bullet could ever have found a fitter mark.

The man with his stump of candle was still searching the rags on the floor. I left the room in a boiling rage, and brought our cart into the yard, threw a cloth over the ghastly doll, leaned my rifle against the doorpost, and stared into the leaden grey night – this was China! A flayed skin – a man at the extreme height of unbearable torture for the sake of his money – six and a half dollars! A gang whose bestial and cruel instincts exceeded those of an animal gone mad! Hell seemed to open before me like a cauldron of molten lead – an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth – these words of a pitiless deity flashed through me and filled me with awe. At last this dreadful night paled into the longed-for dawn of a new day, again to pass without any further mishaps. When I entered the house all were asleep – that awful wailing had ceased in the silence of death, the body lay in the kitchen, its breathing ended. I lit the fire and put on the kettle, and then awakened my men. They arose one by one, red-eyed, and came into the yard. The sun had not yet topped the horizon, but all the country round was bathed in clear morning light. We had scarcely harnessed the horses when two armed Mongols entered the yard and asked the men standing round what had happened during the night.

In the jurts close by, five soldiers, supposed to guard this station, were quartered, who now appeared with their

A CHAKHAR BANDIT

rifles slung across their backs, like children full of inquisitive questions; a few Chakhar women, obviously belonging to them, also appeared. Not one of the Chinese thought of reproaching these soldiers, and willingly told their gruesome story. One of the Mongols asked if there had been any of his race amongst the gang, and as the Chinese said no, he clinched his fist, stuck his thumb straight up, and exclaimed '*Za-a*,' praising his race above all others; then he went to the kitchen to inspect the flayed corpse – this cowardly dog! Presently he would be placing his lice carefully into the dust so as not to kill them, ignorant of the motive that prompted him.

This day we started off, expecting to be attacked by the murderous gang at any moment; and as soon as we were out of sight of the station I sank most of our money into the water barrel, keeping a little in a leather bag tied by its strings to the seat of the cart in case of need. We were driving through country that was somewhat inhabited, and showed slight attempts at agriculture. Chinese peasants stood near the road in faded blue linen shirts. Were they genuine, or only pretending to be peacably at work during the day, throwing off this disguise as soon as night covered the country? For this was the secret procedure of many of these peasants. Somewhere in the field probably, their arms and their uniform coats with epaulettes torn off, lay in safe concealment. All the villages of the dreaded Bias Bay swarmed with these seemingly peaceful peasants. They were also met at Singapore disguised as travelling noblemen, getting on to the most modern ships, overwhelming the staff when least expecting attack, and looting the ship. Then they would row to land comfortably with their spoils somewhere in Bias Bay, and vanish once more into the peaceful countryside, and it was useless to look for the offender unless he could be caught in the act of one of his villainies. Things in China had suddenly become

chaotic and beyond all human control. Each new face one met was regarded suspiciously, for at any moment one might find oneself in the midst of a gang of cut-throats, whom a short while before one had seen by the wayside peacefully engaged with basket and hoe.

In the next village I came across some Chinese chauffeurs known to me from Urga. They were stranded here with their skeleton cars, and could not return to Kalgan as they were known everywhere to be the servants of Feng Yu-hsiang, and their heads were at stake. They asked us anxiously if we had met any of Chang So-lin's soldiers. As we had not they accompanied us part of the way on the doubtful chance of still finding the road to Kalgan open. No one knew how things were going. Since Feng's flight no one brought definite news. All traffic was at a standstill. . . . Constant showers of rain now fell over the country, which slowly and steadily assumed a wonderful green garb.

Two days later, as we approached Paymachang, a man on a pony came riding over a hill to one side of our path – obviously a European, apparently taking a quiet morning ride! I halted and signalled to him with a rag tied to the butt of a whip. He trotted up to us, and told me he was a Swedish missionary. His story was another blood-curdling contrast to the seeming peace of our environment, with grazing herds on both sides of us. The villages around, he told us, had all been pillaged two nights before by marauding gangs, who left destruction and death in their wake. Many Chinese had sought refuge in the mission house. Last night this had been the scene of terrible happenings, and the screams of women had quite unstrung this missionary. He stared straight ahead with wild and overwrought eyes. The missionaries of the settlement, a woman and two men, had tried with good words to conciliate and persuade the robbers; and it was a sheer marvel that they were still alive at all, for their mission camp lay

desolate, and all the Chinese sheltering in it had been murdered or dragged away. This man was riding afield in the hope of meeting some regular soldiers of Chang So-lin's – to me it seemed he might be going from the frying-pan into the fire, and I could only wish the poor fellow good fortune. Our wheel-tracks had so far been overshadowed by some extraordinary luck, or protective power, guarding our unconscious steps, through the regions of hell, murder, and destruction, and wending our way unhurt along the edge of terrifying all-devouring dangers.

Presently we came upon a herd of about seventy sheep not far from our path all standing with their heads butting inwards, a dense scrimmage of yellow fuzzy wool, like a yellow mop resting on a lot of thin moving stalks. Near by a woman in a dirty Mongolian robe held both her arms out wide from loose hanging sleeves, and looked rather like a scarecrow trying to embrace the whole field. Opposite to her stood a child in the same position trying to increase the stretch of its little arms by holding out a thin bundle of twigs. Both were shouting soothing words at the excited mass of animals which seemed bent on suffocating themselves. Now and then a few heads would be tossed up from this woolly blanket to gain a breath of air, while terror drove these creatures ever more and more towards the centre. About fifty feet from this mob of sheep I saw a large wolf tearing at the warm lungs of his victim, all coral red with bloody sinews and shreds hanging from them. He was a splendid animal in sleek and shiny condition, causing this panic in order to satisfy his hunger. The Mongol woman waved her arms about as if trying to fly, the child hit with its bundle of twigs on to the fat quarters of the sheep, but the wolf, devouring his bleeding meal in full sunlight close by, took no notice whatever, and let me approach until my shot felled him. He tried to rear his broken back, lifted his head, and snapped into the air;

then turned, bit into his own fur, and rolled over dead. The Mongol woman screamed like one possessed. I put the rifle back on to the cart; the bullet I had shot ought to be lying in the heart of him who had flayed that man alive, for he was far more devilish than this wolf. Weighed in the scales of justice the work of this bullet had a doubtful balance, for it interfered with circumstances that I began to view from a different angle. My rifle had interfered with a law of nature; and if placed in the hands of an Asiatic would drag out brutal instincts. The soldier here (where war had suddenly created him) seemed a grotesque monster which with imported weapons devoured the peaceful burgher, who in his terror did not understand that this was a result of war. Armies stood opposed to each other, in apparent political opposition; but the next moment, thrusting these considerations aside, they joined in the common object for which they owned these arms, throwing themselves on the unarmed and tearing out their hearts with unnatural ferocity.

Over the village we then approached a cloud of terror hung, ready to renew its havoc at any moment. The preceding night had brought its devastating visitation, but this did not preclude a return. The host of the inn, sodden with opium, sat with glazed eyes. He told such strange stories that it was impossible to say how much was the fabrication of opium-intoxication, and whether there was any truth mingled therein. As it was evening, we prepared to spend the night here. Fear stalked about the place, and the host was by no means pleased to see us and our conveyance under his roof. He kept on examining the bolts of the gate to be sure they were secure, and each time a dog barked he started up, with a finger laid to his lips. The night was full of fear, and terror lurked in every shadow.

This host advised us to bear to the east rather than continue along the straight path. Sooner or later we were

bound to cross the line of Chang So-lin's troops, which already occupied most of the eastern villages. According to him the bandits were beginning to leave the eastern regions, plying their trade more to the south and west. A slender hope stirred once more. Had we really escaped by the skin of our teeth from the worst dangers?

Towards break of day a Chinese peasant-boy appeared, willing to show us the way across country, eager to earn a few dollars; but whether our much-worn cart and team could continue seemed a detail to these people, though a detail I thoroughly realized when, sinking to the axle in sodden fields, I searched in vain for any sign of a road. We crossed several that all led elsewhere as we laboured along, in such a state of exhaustion that we began to doubt whether all this trouble was worth while. Nor had we come to the end of our ordeals. The immediate future would show what to expect at the hands of Chang So-lin's troops. If, as the peasant told us, they had been chasing the marauding gangs of the opposing army the day before, I augured that it was a matter of jealousy and rivalry amongst wolves. But the host's suggestions were reasonable – sooner or later we were bound to pass into their territory; we had little more to lose, and could in no way avoid the encounter.

After a time we at last came to an apology for a path. Heavy rain had recently fallen, and aggravated its lamentable condition to the verge of impassability. It was full of furrows and holes several feet deep, filled with water. We had to push along the ridge at the side, separating it from a ditch, which ridge was often blocked with large stones. Our cart was frequently at such an angle that it threatened to topple over, while the struggling ponies kept sliding downwards in the wet clay at both sides. Sweat streamed from our faces, and all was sheer misery as we clambered up an incline and reached the top, hardly

able to stand on our legs. In the hollow below us lay a small hamlet consisting of a few mud huts, surrounded by fields of maize and oats. We improvised a brake by shoving a long stick through the spokes of the wheels, so that they dragged, and then proceeded downhill towards this village. We had got down a good way when suddenly three shots were fired, and something whizzed past our heads. I saw three little tufts of smoke rise over a maize plantation, and a Chinaman jumped up, grabbing frantically at the halter of a frightened upstarting camel. He had a red rag tied round his rifle. A moment later four figures rose, all armed. So here we were face to face with *Chunkuze!* We stared at each other; the lad who showed us the way had vanished. Shouts came from the village, and a lot of grey-clad soldiers swarmed out of the courtyards, while Chinese in blue shirts appeared on the walls. Two of the gang came and took hold of our bridles as though we could escape from this predicament; the rest surrounded us and shoved their rifles in front of my stomach! One of them, quaking with excitement, shouted at me for my passport, while I hoped his rifle would not go off in the excitement. All joined in a fiendish clamour of oaths and swear words. While I searched for my passport the soldiers, who were of Chang So-lin's army, fell upon the cart. I turned and caught the arm of my interpreter, and drew him aside. He was open-mouthed and ashen-faced; the shaft of a riding-whip had been struck across his face – horrible! One of my Chinese sat down in the field, coughing his heart out and stooping forward. I handed my passport to the man confronting me, held my interpreter back, and ordered him to keep quiet; he was unaware of the blood streaming from his nose. My Chinese, usually so imperturbable, in a moment like this lost all self-control and discretion. Some of the soldiers had got hold of the bundles belonging to them, one of them grabbed my riding-boots,

another the Winchester rifle. I began dealing out cigarettes and got things into a calmer frame, though I too saw red; but I knew our only chance lay in keeping calm. I ordered my Chinese to go to the village, but one of them still squatted with hanging head. My aim was to keep the soldiers round us, and thus we proceeded through a field of oats to where a lot of people had collected near the walls. Our cart followed. In the village a long argument took place, surrounded by old and young. The commandant of this troop had the rank of a corporal, or something of that kind; his men were terrible creatures to look at, half starved and dishevelled, with ragged boots. All were armed with Russian rifles. Not one of them could read or write. My passport wandered from hand to hand, each man more stupid and full of blatant curiosity than the last. However, after some deliberation the commandant came to the excellent decision to send us on under escort. Thus the trouble abated, and we had after all not fared so badly, though all had hung by a mere hair, as I now realized. Once more I had to thank my 'luck!' There was no relying on my Chinese: as soon as they got excited they lost all sense of the danger they were in, and were like wild animals blindly butting against a stone wall, and altogether bereft of reason. The one who had been squatting in the field now came and joined us silently, his face all scratched and kicked about by the feet of the soldiers, and blood oozing from his temples. Three soldiers had meanwhile taken their place on the cart, and spread themselves in comfort without the least regard for us. It was our job, not theirs, to get the cart under way again, augmented by their weight. Further down, where we had to traverse a wide stretch of sand, they never budged or moved a hand to help us in our efforts, even at our urgent request. They seemed afraid to part from their rifles which they clutched at full cock, and they also held all our papers.

With the greatest efforts we managed to push our cart up the next steep incline; but hardly had we got over the hill, than we sank again up to our knees in a green swamp which our narrow wheels cut into like porridge. Now more than ever the escorting soldiers preferred to remain high and dry, while they watched us sinking deeper and deeper. By dint of pushing boards under the wheels we somehow got the cart through, and landed once more on firm ground, covered from head to foot with black, evil-smelling mud. From their vantage-point our escort now directed our further way across pathless fields, and swore at our slow progress. All the time I had my work cut out to prevent the interpreter from answering them back in the same vein. I had no wish whatever to rouse the devil again, after we had just got through the last crisis by the skin of our teeth; another was only too easy to bring about. Without the least protest I noticed that the bag of money I had fixed to the seat of the cart had vanished; but the water barrel was still intact, and so were the cases which contained my work of three years – the cause of all this arduous and hazardous journey.

In two hours we reached the next village. In a maize field all trodden down and devastated, stood a company of soldiers even more woebegone than those we had encountered before. They were well armed, but their clothes, partly uniform and partly ordinary, were very tattered. All had rags tied round the locks of their rifles. No vestige was left of their Chinese cloth shoes; these were replaced with dilapidated Chakha boots, which proved to me that this troop had come by a wide curve through inner Mongolia. Now they lay amidst the laboriously husbanded fields of Chinese peasants, devasting the fruits of their labours, taking their animals, and outraging their women with a brutal indifference due to being in possession of weapons. The peasantry of China saw their homesteads

and all the harvest of their hard and frugal labours destroyed, and their animals taken. In despair the peasant deserted all his regular habits, and, attracted by the easy life and unbridled power of these soldiers, was drawn into this vortex of destruction, which raged even beyond the confines of active warfare. In this village I came before an officer, who at least wore a better uniform than his men. He examined our papers and discussed us in detail with his subordinates – while these eyed us with suspicion and hostility, and seemed inclined to shear off our heads on the spot. One of them made a gesture with his finger across his neck in pointing to me, which was not to be misunderstood. We stood like sheep within sight and smell of the slaughter-house – a very peculiar and unpleasant experience. My Chinese had now become servile, and ready to plead merely for the boon of continued existence. Half an hour later we got away again under a new escort. Passing through the village we saw a few women and girls, puffy and nauseating, their faces, heavily coated with pink chalk, looking like masks of sheer vice. The ponies of the soldiers were allowed to graze about free, trampling down the fields. In the wake of our cart lay broken maize and oats, beyond recovery in this unhappy year. The daily bread of thousands had been wantonly stamped into the ground. As we entered the next village we passed the corpse of a peasant with his face split in halves. We halted before a gate guarded by soldiers, who presented arms, whereupon a Chinaman in a sort of dressing-gown appeared accompanied by an adjutant with a shiny belt full of cartridges and a Mauser pistol. Our escort also presented arms, which the dressing-gowned individual acknowledged by a negligent gesture of his hand. I addressed him in English, and he made polite excuses through my interpreter, and then ordered his adjutant to escort us at once to Miauten, the headquarters of the General Staff. He had

the polished deportment of a high military officer, and the polite manner of a Chinese gentleman, with an impenetrable eye. The adjutant vanished and reappeared immediately in virginal white cotton gloves: he spread a cloth to sit upon, and we drove on. We reached Miauten in about three hours, where our further journey to Kalgan was sanctioned. Miauten was like an army camp – all the streets were crowded with soldiers, arms were piled everywhere, and grey munition carts swarmed. All the arms were Japanese. The soldiers' weapons shone, the cavalry had fat, well-fed horses and gleaming saddlery.

In spite of the polite sanction accorded to me, I thought it inadvisable to proceed that evening through this district crawling with military, and decided to camp in front of the headquarters of the General Staff, for it seemed the safest place in which to pass this night. A premonition warned me not to trust the apparent discipline of these soldiers once darkness had set in. This night more than ever I sat on pins and needles listening to the constant barking of dogs. Had we gone on that night we might indeed have fared badly. Towards evening the Retreat being sounded gave this military camp, in the centre of which we were, an appearance of organization – though it was only an appearance. As a matter of fact, it put an end to the order of the day, and was the sign that freedom and night were now in full sway. In the angles of the narrow alleys around the free space we were camping in, strange doings took place, while the General Staff had seemingly closed their eyes and stopped their ears as soon as the Retreat had been sounded. It seemed to be their general rule to reward the discipline of the troops during daylight with complete and undisturbed freedom to plunder and pillage at night. I longed for the blessed dawn; for our only safety lay in daylight, in spite of the guard at the gate, in spite of our free passes to Kalgan. And at last, after

endless waiting, dawn did come. The noises of the night died down as the light increased; and, with the first ray of sunlight touching the roofs, we drove down the main street on our way to Kalgan. The road was in fairly good condition, and led steadily down hill. During the afternoon we descended the steep zigzags and were soon level with Kalgan. We had met no military detachments until within three miles of the town, where we got into the thick pall of dust of a long line of transport. Chinese peasants drove their carts piled up with every kind of rubbish, and spent soldiers with open shirts sat or lay upon the top, all shrouded in thick layers of grey dust. Flies of all kinds hovered like a cloud about the faces of the men and the sweating ponies. A few badly wounded, hollow-cheeked men lay on the less overpacked carts, and were slowly being jolted to death. One of them was wailing for water in a half-muted voice . . . but no one cared. The driver seemed even to be amused. This string of carts extended for an hour's march, and we were glad to turn down a by-way. All the principal roads were blocked with military and hidden under curtains of impenetrable dust, all going to Kalgan, into whose gates the troops of Chang So-lin had been pouring from every direction since the day before.

This human flood flowed into the cauldron-shaped valley of Kalgan, sweeping down all the paths like boiling lava, while the dust rose like white steam, in a dense wall. Full-bellied clouds hung low in the sky. Having our papers examined did not delay us long, and after half an hour's drive through the streets, densely packed with soldiers, we reached the Russian hotel. We found it heavily barricaded from without and within, and, with the greatest caution, the gate was unwillingly opened for me. At that moment a deluge of rain burst down upon us accompanied by a few sharp claps of thunder. I was drenched to the skin, looking

no doubt more unkempt and dishevelled than ever. By the time we had got the cart in, the yard was a sheet of water. But here I was at last, and though utterly weary and worn by five weeks of constant travelling, through terrible and nerve-racking circumstances, I found little comfort in having got thus far. The air was charged with accumulating trouble, ready to disrupt at any moment. All the shops of Kalgan were closed and shuttered, and the helpless inhabitants watched with anxiety this sinister disaster-bringing flood pour down its dusty roads without any check – Kalgan was doomed, its fate was sealed.

I had nothing to change into, as all my clothes had been stolen on the way, so I tried to send a servant with a ten-dollar note to buy me a change of linen; but he refused to cross the street with this money – it was nearly evening, and he dared not leave the premises. The Russian hotel-keeper helped me out with the loan of a shirt and an old pair of trousers. He said that he could in no way be responsible for my safety, now that the devil was abroad. I was in the grip of despair and fatigue, as I threw myself into the long arm-chair, and inquired about rail connections to Peking. Two days ago, they told me, the first train in the last five months had left with troops for Peking. Half-way it had fallen down the bank, and according to reports, a hundred and fifty men were killed. Kalgan was overfilled with troops whose further progress was stopped, while a jumble of wood and iron blocked this single rail line. My long, exhausting adventure seemed to be ending in a *cul-de-sac!* With the last remnants of strength left me, I tried to keep my head clear; I must not give in after all that had happened, and allow myself to be sucked under when the seaport was so near; but despair loomed large between it and me, and I was at the end of my tether. Recollection of the high anticipation with which I first started from Kalgan rose to my memory, while now, on

my return, I saw the other side of the picture. How was I to get away at once? For leave I must as fast as ever I could. There must be some way! That last bit to Peking – only eight hours by rail! The Russian laughed at himself and at me, and was about to light a 'papierosse' when a horn signal startled the air, another further off, and again one, short and broken off. *Tara – tara – tarattata* . . . From all sides the call rang out. The Russian stood transfixed, as if testing the air with his burning match, while the cigarette hung limp from his lip. '*Tak*,' he said, 'plundering.' From that moment Kalgan was given over to the mob which filled its streets. Shots cracked here and there in the inner and outer regions of the town – with much shouting and running. The Chinese hotel-servants stood with distended necks in the yard and listened to the uproar in the streets. Darkness fell rapidly upon all, and after a while things around us grew still – abnormally still – for the disorder had drifted past our place. Again a shot rang out, and seemed to have hit glass – somewhere in the neighbourhood. And then the rain began to fall. Thank God, thought I; this will put an end to the day's adventures. It was about nine o'clock. The boy came in and drew the curtains close. I wondered why, when all the shutters were already closed; then he lit a candle and placed it on the washing-stand. The rain poured down in torrents, and the sound of its splashing was most welcome. A Chinese woman with pointed goat's feet and a blue cloth coat crept into the room next door. The Russian said she would have to stay the night, for she could not now venture across the street to her home. The Retreat call sounded faintly from the distance through the rain. The burghers could now lie down with bruised and sore heads, but the soldiers still went about the streets in a restless spirit of mischief. I must have fallen into sleep and oblivion, when a sudden cry startled me back to Kalgan, with a Chinese woman

next door – someone had screamed, or was it a dream? All seemed confused, and I could hardly tell. But then another cry rang out into the night – and voices speaking next door. I stepped into the doorway. The cry had come from the field beyond. Again it sounded, but now further away. I ran to the window and tore back the curtains; but the boy appeared in the doorway and said, 'No, no,' with a deterring gesture, as though to say: 'It is none of our concern!' I asked what was happening, and he whispered 'Soldiers,' in a voice of terror; so I sat down again, while Death pranced through the town – and over the fields . . . that cry sounded like the last moment of a life. Next morning about nine o'clock, a Swiss acquaintance, having heard of my arrival, came to the hotel. He went to the window, drew the curtain, and seeing that the shutters were closed – he laughed, and remarked that I looked pale and thin. And then he laughed again, and his laughter seemed to me brutal and offensive, as he opened the window. At the edge of the maize plantation the bodies of two Chinese women lay, one a half-grown girl. They had been outraged, and their throats had been cut.

At the railway station I was told vaguely that a train might leave that afternoon, any time after 3, or 4, or 5, or 6 p.m. or perhaps not at all – but it was only for military use. However, the ticket office was open. I returned to the hotel to settle up. My three Chinese were there. Their money which had lain in the water tank was handed back to them, the carriage and horses I decided to fetch, if I did not manage to get away by train; but otherwise I had not the heart to look at them again, for what could I do for these poor animals? By 2 p.m. I sat in the station, in my own dried clothes with my cases. It looked doubtful whether I should be able to take these cases to Peking as it was a military train; yet I managed to get them weighed and stuck over with large labels of 'owner's risk,' the hotel

servant and a bundle of dollar notes having helped me to get through the labyrinth of Chinese administration.

The train left at 5.30, filled almost to bursting point, with a malodorous spitting crowd, in which I was the only European, shoved hither and thither, and squeezed and pushed about without the least consideration. At times it seemed as if I were not regarded as a human being at all. The world belonged to this unbridled mob, and its uncivilized customs were triumphant. Boys, hardly more than children, had Mauser pistols, that seemed larger than they were, girthed to their slender hips. Their eyes had a dissolute look as they toyed with these weapons. Garlic-laden breath was blown into my face, my feet were targets to spit upon – but the hope of reaching Peking next day braced me up through this long torture. The progress was slow, for the cursed train kept stopping for one reason or another. My nerves were strained to the utmost. How long, O God, how long?

. . . . .

All within me was at breaking-point, and my body was worn out by the prolonged physical strain of this terrible journey. I was wedged in, scarcely daring to trust to luck. A mere flicker of the eye might precipitate my fate; and powerless as I was under the brutality and impudence of my neighbours, a gesture might give the signal for a general attack on my person. I was carrying a good deal more money on me than that unfortunate fellow who had been skinned alive. The notice 'At owner's risk' on my luggage held good for my person also, as all those about me, accustomed to terrorize the country, knew well; for had not free citizenship and all the rights thereunto pertaining, with a great trafficking in posts as lieutenants and captains and generals been sold to them, in return for

their war-service? It was a matter of almost daily occurrence that some general who found himself in a good strategical position suddenly sold his advantage to the other side, ruining the cause he represented; though within twenty-four hours he might be bought back again to the side he had abandoned. This was possible to such time-servers who cared little, as long as their inherent right to pillage and ransack everywhere and everything they chose was in no way curtailed. If trouble overtook them, they simply turned their coats and went over to those who had been opposing them.

I was completely at the mercy of this double-sided crew, and ran the gauntlet of their inimical and cruel glances, in which I could see the vacillating desire to cut my throat. Indeed, I felt surprised that they had not already done so, or that one of those youths had not blown out my brains from behind. No one knew I was in this train; there was no guarantee for my safety; my life was as cheap as that of any Chinese, of whose coming and going no earthly record was kept. Did my white skin in any way indicate the gap between Asiatic and European to be too wide for my companions to venture across, and therefore prove my only protection from rough handling? Like that unknown quantity in a human being before which a wild animal, though ten times as strong, will turn and flee? I felt like a primitive man sitting on the neck of a mammoth and trying to direct its colossal strength; the least unforeseen movement of the monster could send me flying to earth with mangled limbs – a modern European in modern China!

If only sleep could have helped me to forget some of the worst horrors of the journey! All around me sweated and stank and spat. Every few minutes the train halted, for what seemed like ages, then crept on a few yards at a snail's pace, only to halt again with a sudden jerk all down its length. Darkness fell, and the atmosphere was like that

of an ill-kept stable, worse . . . like an open sewer, for the Chinese had closed every window. I felt suffocated, and my gorge rose at the malodorous bundles and clothes of my companions. I seemed to be in the grip of one of those dreadful nightmares in which one vainly struggles for air. My head ached and throbbed, and what senses were left me reeled when I thought of how long this might go on before we reached Peking.

The men around me lay about in every imaginable position – sunk forwards or sideways or backwards – and they snored with open mouths. They lay across my legs and leaned against my back, while I sat on through the night. Should I ever reach Peking alive, and when – O when – would we get there? I had no idea how far we had come, and could not shift or ease my body. At last, even thus, I dozed off into a torture of bad dreams, for my brain could not escape from my surroundings though my body was mercifully oblivious for an hour or two of this intolerable torment.

When I awoke, it was a relief to find that the sun had risen. We were passing through a steep cutting, probably near the Nankau pass. The train moved at foot pace. Since half-past five of the previous day we had done about half the journey. Then the train slowed down even more, and everyone in it crowded to the windows. Below, down a steep, slanting bank, lay a large locomotive with its wheels to the sky, and all its bluish ironwork exposed, like a dead lobster cast up on the sand. Further down lay two carriages crushed up like bandboxes, amidst a mass of scrap-iron entanglement. Coupled wheels stood up on their axles a little apart, looking like large dumb-bells used by some giant acrobat.

An accident had happened here just before, and a hundred and fifty men had been overtaken by a sudden fate and crushed to death on this stretch of single rail.

But life was cheap, and these machines were new toys and little under control. As the view widened, after passing through the cutting, we saw the earthwork of a few trenches. War or defence had played a short game here, though with very little actual fighting. It all looked as if children had been playing away an idle afternoon, notwithstanding their Russian instructors.

Presently we saw a section of that world wonder, the Great Wall, a gigantic monument of human endeavour. It stretched over hills and valleys, crept up steep banks, lifting its massive strength of curves, bulging out every now and then into crenellated watch-towers; it was the product of Chinese mentality embodying their idea of defence of themselves and their territory from enemies that surged up against this Wall in waves of demon-driven fury. A natural determination of the race to face a natural enemy had created this stone protection which stretched towards Tibet. Earth-born necessity had impelled them to create one of their greatest works of art, in defence of religion pitted against religion.

The little spade-dug earthwork of modern trenches near by seemed more than ever a puerile farce – futile, foreign, and useless in such a country; a childish but dangerous game; the unnatural advance made by the white skins of Europe against the yellow skins of China. In all that lay around me I perceived nature's retaliation and revenge for the outrage offered to its conservatism. On one side missionaries, not realizing the ideal impossibility of their task, but scenting business, turn Christianity into a traffic in soap and other superfluous articles; a dump which undermines and floods over every boundary in the shape of 'business,' heedless of all other values. This importation of ideas essentially European, and altogether foreign to Chinese mentality, was here turned topsy-turvy from sheer lack of comprehension, and,

followed as it was by wholesale importation of arms, led to terrible havoc.

China was made a Republic by force, its people knowing neither the why nor the wherefore. Europe had goaded China along artificially made paths that would never have been followed in the ordinary course of its own natural development. And now the revenge of all-powerful Fate was meted out equally and impartially to China and to Europe alike for this spreading broadcast of 'civilizing culture' within boundaries that were unsuitable and inadequate. The pre-existent and natural conditions had been outraged; and the result was a mere travesty of the original European initiative and progress – not human and humane organization.

We were now passing through the rich undulating plains that lie between the heights of the Nankau Pass and Peking, and the train accelerated its pace, determined at last to reach its goal. At a halt a work-worn peasant forced himself into our already over-full carriage. He wore a wide-brimmed, high-crowned straw hat with wisps of blue cloth hanging down each side of his hot face. His open shirt showed a sweat-covered chest, like a glazed, corrugated roof-tile, and his limp body was propped on bent and uncertain legs. Under his arm he clutched a faded blue bundle tied up with string. From his high cheek-bones the face sagged down, and large smoke-browned teeth showed through the pale violet lips that hung open. A flattened nose, and watery eyes like plumstones, gave him a monkey-like appearance. He was the epitome of a hard life of work sodden with opium as its only solace. This poor creature squeezed himself modestly into a corner; but alas, the soldiers soon turned their attention to him and quickly evoked a heated argument. One of them attempted to lay hold of the blue bundle which he clutched so tightly, and the next moment the butt of a riding-whip

descended mercilessly across the poor fellow's face, sending his hat off backwards. Wedged between the laughing soldiers as I was, each blow sent a shiver through me, and I felt the earth must surely open and swallow us all. The peasant was helpless; with open mouth he tried to say a few disjointed words as he worked his way towards the door, still clutching his bundle, amid kicks, and blows from that merciless whip-handle. His bundle was then torn from him, and he clung to the doorpost leaning outwards. But they beat furiously on his hands till he let go and fell out head foremost like a heavy sack – the while the wheels turned and the scenery slid past. Next they cut open the blue bundle and dug about in his rags till they found a roll of copper money which one of them held up between his thumb and finger – twenty-two copper pieces – at which all laughed! They then examined the straw hat in and out, and threw it out of the door, stuffing the rags under the seat. Great heavens! would this hellish journey ever come to an end? Soon we came upon a goods-train loaded up with artillery, and a few brand-new motor cars; also a saloon carriage with Chinese at the windows playing and smoking, obviously high officers.

At three o'clock that afternoon the train drew up at Chichi-men, the eastern gate of Peking, some distance outside the station. All got out. I too rose with stiffened legs and jumped out, and hardly staggered a few steps when I was spied by a covey of rickshaw coolies. They snatched up the slender shafts of their rickshaws and shouted from afar, as they tore towards me in a mad race, the tall, light wheels hopping merrily over the rails – a close heat. They almost thrust their shafts into my stomach, barred my way, and each endeavoured to overshout the other, claiming to be the first. Dogs in Mongolia, rickshaw coolies in Peking! I noticed that several soldiers the while were trying in vain to get a conveyance, and, holding their

bundles, were haggling with the coolies who simply refused to drive them A policeman approached unnoticed, and began belabouring Chinese pates freely with his wooden truncheon. But they would not give way. 'The first, the first,' each insisted. To put an end to the scrimmage I got into one of the rickshaws; it happened to be one of the last to reach me, and the driver gave me a look of silent question. I cried '*Zoba, zoba!*' but all the other coolies held me tight, and now pointed with sudden justice to the one who really had been there first, and he it was who finally drove me into the station. Here I was told that the luggage-van could not be unloaded for three or four hours, and that it would be impossible for me to get my precious cases until then. What was I to do? Should I wait on this platform till these four Chinese hours had passed by, in my present condition of dirt and complete exhaustion? After the feverish nightmare of the journey I had only one urgent desire – sleep – sleep – sleep. The tidal wave of misfortune seemed at last to have receded, for luck had guided me to the comparatively safe landing-stage of Peking; and now there was only this urgent need for sleep! I made one more attempt to get my cases by bribery, but it was useless. The luggage-van stood far back, a guard of grey soldiers with gleaming bayonets drawn up round it. A command rang out, and they spread themselves round the whole train, each of them one pace distant from another. Would they be on guard all the time? Well then, in two hours I would be back, and with a sigh of relief I mounted my rickshaw and drove into the town. Here was the goal of my long journey at last, a point of rest which after the prolonged strain seemed like the awakening from horror, as to which I was hardly sure whether it had been real or only a dream. I only knew I had been through hell and had come to the other side safely.

The eastern gate curves its huge arches over a double

passage and is surmounted by a high tower, built in galleries and provided with narrow windows, and was then in the full light of the afternoon sun. Soldiers and arms everywhere; and piled bayonets and rifles; officers in white gloves. The rickshaws that carried private Chinese were stopped and the occupants were felt all over for concealed weapons. There was a commotion, and a Chinaman with a bullet-proof waistcoat was put under guard of two soldiers, while his rickshaw man, who tried to slink away, was knocked down. Near by stood a moving refreshment barrow, one low table serving as kitchen and another as dining table, with little porcelain bowls and chopsticks laid out. A couple of camels paced out of the shadow of the tunnelled gate in disdainful silhouettes; detached and aloof from all this human misery, they swayed with stately rubber-shod steps and humps drooped sideways, their shaggy coats thick with dust. Life was seething like a swarm of ants.

The clang of an up-to-date tram came from the town, and hit sharp against the steep ramparts. The streets were ankle-deep in dust, and most of the shops were closed. That bullet-proof waistcoat came to my mind, and I wondered vaguely who that particular Chinaman might be; a man of position he seemed – possibly this waistcoat indicated a special person, especially 'wanted'; perhaps some bandit or a general who was anxiously seeking safety. Many heads had rolled into the dust here only the day before. Chang So-lin showed scant consideration, and no hesitation in consigning people safely into the next world. An hour's run brought us to the hotel, which proved to be overcrowded. Not only Europeans had sought the safety of these Legation quarters, but many wealthy Chinese. In the hall, five o'clock tea, with a band playing merry tunes, was in full swing. I stood in the office like a Jonah just disgorged from the belly of the whale, and felt very small

before so many strange eyes. Every corner, even the bathrooms, was occupied in this usually quiet hotel. The highest prices were overbidden by Chinese on their knees, only to get on to neutral ground and be safe from the persecution which awaited them beyond the bounds of the Legation. Again I bethought me of that bullet-proof waistcoat. Was the owner on his way to this hotel, or had he been turned away from it, with only his waistcoat to protect him?

I took the hotel porter, who looked just like a Chinese Buddha, back to the station with me to fetch my cases. The station-master sent me to the luggage office. Something seemed wrong to me, and my Buddha thought so too. At the latter office an officer examined my papers carefully, took us to another office, and back again; asked me if we had carriers – something seemed very wrong! Behind all these questions he was screening his embarrassment, and seemed to be running like a dog round a hot plate of food. Finally he rummaged in a drawer for his keys, opened a door into a darkened shed, and pointed to my cases, shouting quickly to my Buddha for the carriers to take them up at once and be off. The moment my eyes had focussed to the gloom, I saw that all the cases had been opened, their broken lids laid in splinters on top, and a broad white paper band stuck over, with 'September 28' printed large in Chinese letters thereon. I looked mutely from them to the officer, my voice having for the moment forsaken me, and I seemed to hear that Russian exclaim '*Tak* – plundering.' Were these broken cases, bulging with torn and crumpled paper all that was left to me? I opened one, and found a medicine case with its contents spilt, bandages unrolled, and a skull drum – articles never packed in this case by me; everything was mixed up, torn, trodden on, and stuffed back into the cases. All my work destroyed! I could see no more, a wave of blood rose to my head, and all went black.

Fate had hit me hardest when I thought all had been well at last!

I felt like a husbandman who, after prolonged toil, might go forth to reap his fair harvest and find it ruined and destroyed by a bolt from the blue, after the ravaging storms had spared his crops – Fate keeping the worst stroke to the last. The Buddha stood by me in silence, as I looked into each case and found the same wanton destruction. Not content with taking the silver and anything of value to themselves, these vandals had mutilated everything they found from sheer wantonness. I tried to say something, but the official interrupted me at once, requesting me to hurry and move my things. I felt more like flying at his throat, but the Buddha got the rickshaw and carriers, and loaded up. And so I drove back to Peking at the end of this procession, like one who was carrying his last hope to burial, in the darkening twilight of a fading day.

All the misery of the last two and a half years, and the many fruitless efforts hovered jeeringly before my eyes, and I was utterly crushed. I had only one wish left now, to leave Asia and to sleep – to sleep – to awaken perhaps on some distant morrow of renewal for further effort. These two and a half years must be wiped out of my life. My body and mind had run the gauntlet of all those horrors for nothing, while I seemed to have been walking on a tight-rope stretched between death and the devil, only to fall to earth at the very last step – under the jeering laughter of the gods.

In the hotel boy's room I rummaged through the mutilated contents of my cases till late at night, and the faint hope of saving some of my work grew ever less and less. All but the silver, costumes, and clothes was there, but in what a hopeless condition! Torn, cut to pieces, begrimed. By the time I held the last bit of crumpled paper in my hands I was shaking all over and could hardly

stand. It was high time to leave off and get some sleep. In the hall all the lights were out except one over the office, and everyone was sound asleep. I sat down on a chair. It was unbearably close. I began to take off my clothes and shoes; even my shirt seemed unendurable. I found a cloth and wrapped it round me, pushing the clothes away; I never wanted to see them again. Tomorrow I would take train to Tientsin where my boxes with fresh clothes awaited me – how I longed for them! A doze of fatigue overcame me that was not actual sleep, for wrapped only in the cloth I wandered down the passage and into the breakfast-room, all laid out ready for the morning guests, who were now reposing in every bed and even in the baths. I discovered a three-cornered bench, lay down on this, and fell into hectic dreams. I seemed to be in a crowded street. All the people were sumptuously clad, and I in only a shirt that hardly covered me. The crowd grew and grew. All stared at me and were laughing, enjoying the joke – ladies in furs – men in evening dress and top hats – all talking excitedly – and pointing at me—! My feet grew cold – I opened my eyes. Amazement! Was I still dreaming? At the tables sat well-dressed, well-rested, civilized people; through the windows the cruel light of a clear morning shone. Great Heavens! Where were my clothes? Had they been torn from me? and I left naked under this too short covering, with all the demons of Fate grinning at me? I clutched the only shred I had about my person, got up, and tiptoed my hasty way through the breakfasting crowd – once again running the gauntlet, in a dance of nature, before a civilized public! Once more that tight-rope stretched, this time over all these breakfast-tables! Behind me I hear laughter. An Englishwoman exclaims 'Shocking!' The boy at the bar knew nothing of my clothes . . .

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